

*Studying
Substance-Abusing Fathers:
Can Evolutionary Concepts Help?*

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Primary Goal

To illustrate how concepts drawn from evolutionary psychology may help us better understand the production and parenting of children within populations of substance-abusing men assumed to be at risk for socially irresponsible fathering...

Acknowledgments

**National Institute on Drug Abuse
Bethesda, Maryland**

**Weltner Foundation
New Haven, Connecticut**

**The APT Foundation
New Haven, Connecticut**

The Background: Policy Considerations

○ Welfare reform

- ▶ **PL 104-193: *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996***

○ Child welfare reform

- ▶ **PL 105-89: *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997***

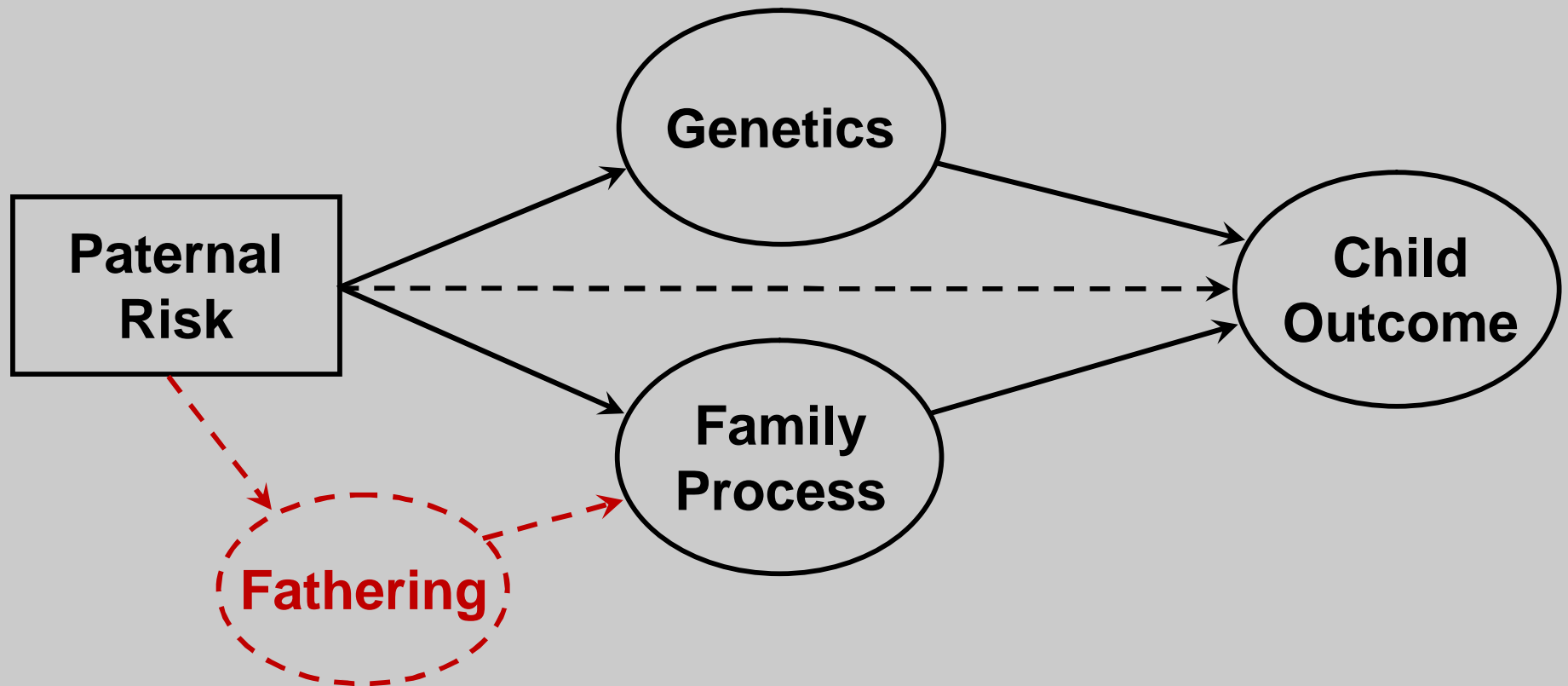
○ DHHS Fatherhood Initiative

- ▶ ***Nurturing Fatherhood* (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998)**

The Background: Risk for Children

- **Paternal substance abuse = Risk for children**
 - ▶ **Externalizing difficulty**
 - ▶ **Internalizing difficulty**
 - ▶ **School failure**
 - ▶ **Early substance use**
 - ▶ **Early substance abuse**
- **Paternal drug abuse > Paternal alcohol abuse?**
- **Paternal + maternal substance abuse = More risk**

The Background: Risk for Children



**Where's Poppa?
(Phares, 1992)**

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Life History Theory

○ Life history theory

- ▶ Evolutionary biology
- ▶ Competing life functions

M Somatic effort

- ▶ Growth and survival of the individual

M Reproductive effort

- ▶ Growth and survival of the species

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Life History Theory

○ Life history theory

▶ Somatic effort versus reproductive effort



▶ Between-species differences

▶ Within-species differences

▶ Evolutionary Theory of Socialization (Belsky et al., 1991)

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Reproductive Strategy

○ Short-term = Low-K

▶ Unstable, stressful early environment

M Inconsistent, insensitive caretaking

M Limited resources

▶ Insecure attachment

▶ Negative view of future

▶ Short-term orientation

▶ Early puberty

▶ Early first sexual intercourse

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Reproductive Strategy

○ Short-term = Low-K

- ▶ Unstable sexual partnerships
- ▶ Early first child
- ▶ More children
- ▶ Spaced closer
- ▶ With different sexual partners
- ▶ With less investment in parenting
- ▶ Adaptive for individual
- ▶ Socially irresponsible

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Reproductive Strategy

- Long-term = High-K
 - ▶ Stable, supportive early environment
 - M Consistent, sensitive caretaking
 - M Adequate resources
 - ▶ Secure attachment
 - ▶ Positive view of future
 - ▶ Longer-term orientation
 - ▶ Later puberty
 - ▶ Later first sexual intercourse

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Reproductive Strategy

- **Long-term = High-K**
 - ▶ **Stable sexual partnerships**
 - ▶ **Later first child**
 - ▶ **Fewer children**
 - ▶ **Spaced further apart**
 - ▶ **With same sexual partner**
 - ▶ **With more investment in parenting**
 - ▶ **Adaptive for individual**
 - ▶ **Socially responsible**

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Drug-Abusing Fathers

Are substance-abusing fathers at risk to pursue a short-term or low-K reproductive strategy?

Studying Reproductive History: Drug-Abusing Fathers

○ Comparative study

- ▶ 106 drug-abusing fathers

 - M Opioid-dependent in methadone treatment

- ▶ 118 fathers living in the same community

 - M No history of alcohol or drug abuse

- ▶ 40.4 ($SD = 6.4$) years old

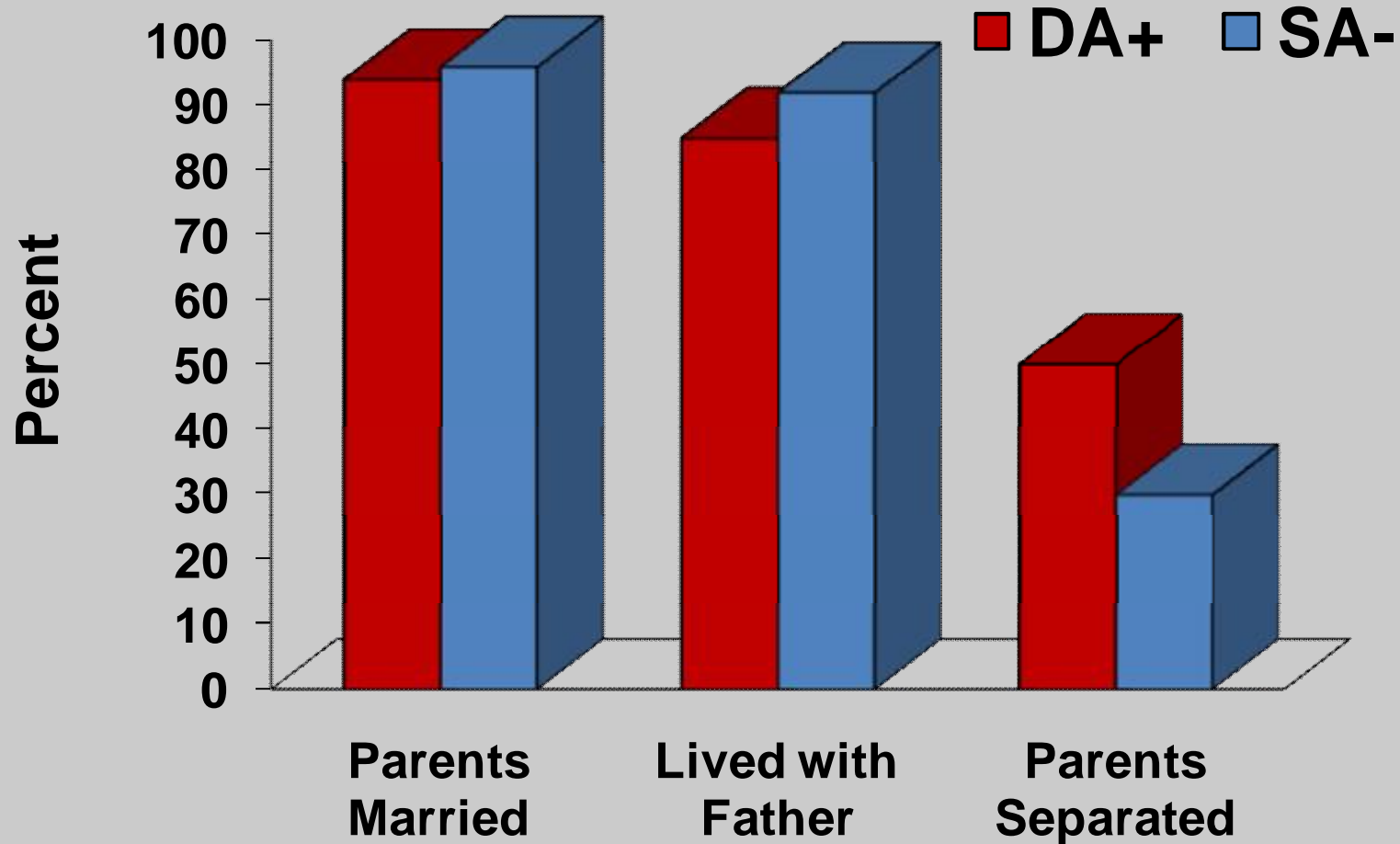
- ▶ Ethnically diverse

 - M 34% African American

 - M 15% Hispanic

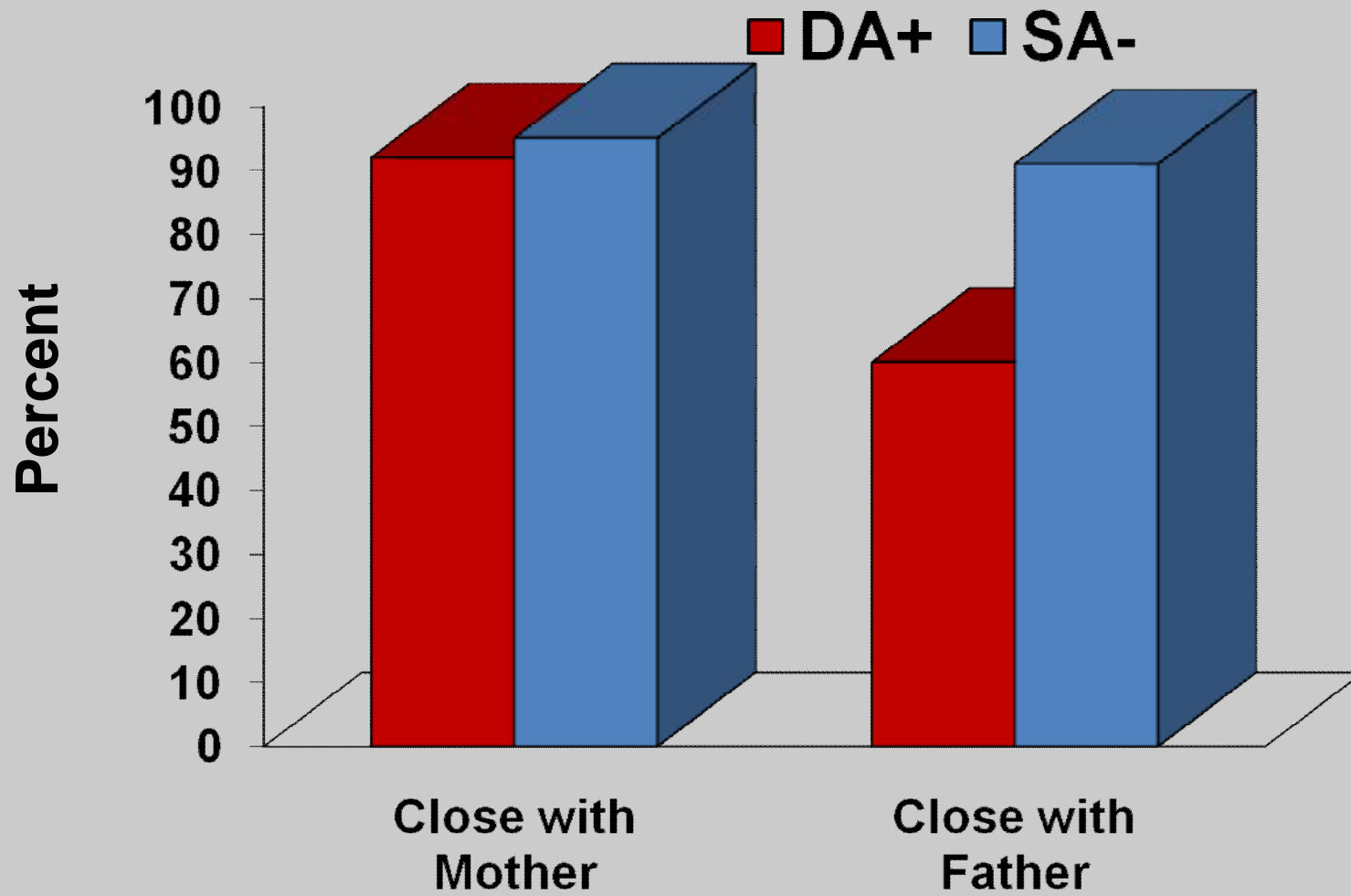
- ▶ 12.7 ($SD = 2.0$) years of education

*McMahon et al. (2010):
Developmental Experiences*



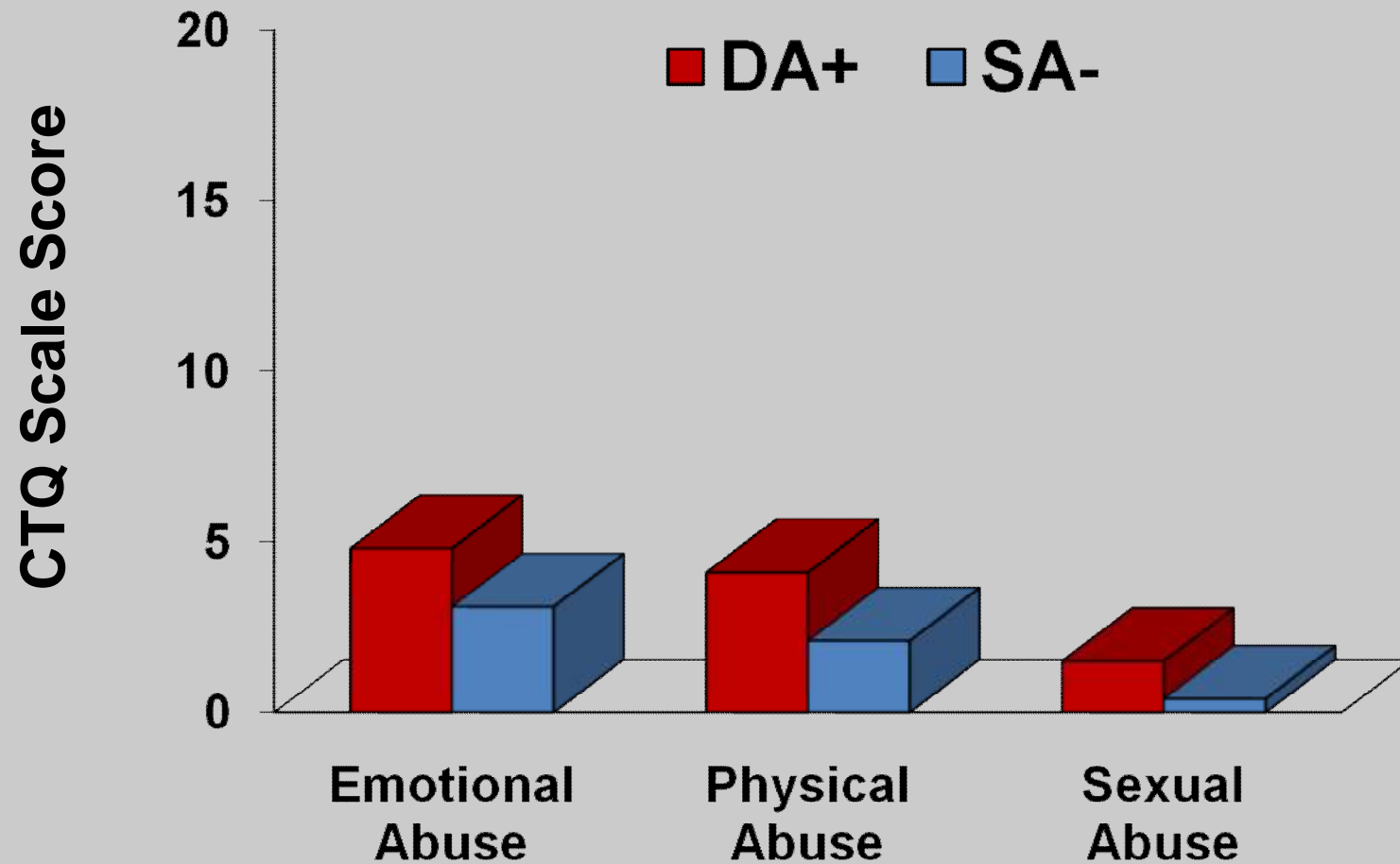
Developmental Experiences of Drug-Abusing Fathers

*McMahon et al. (2010):
Developmental Experiences*



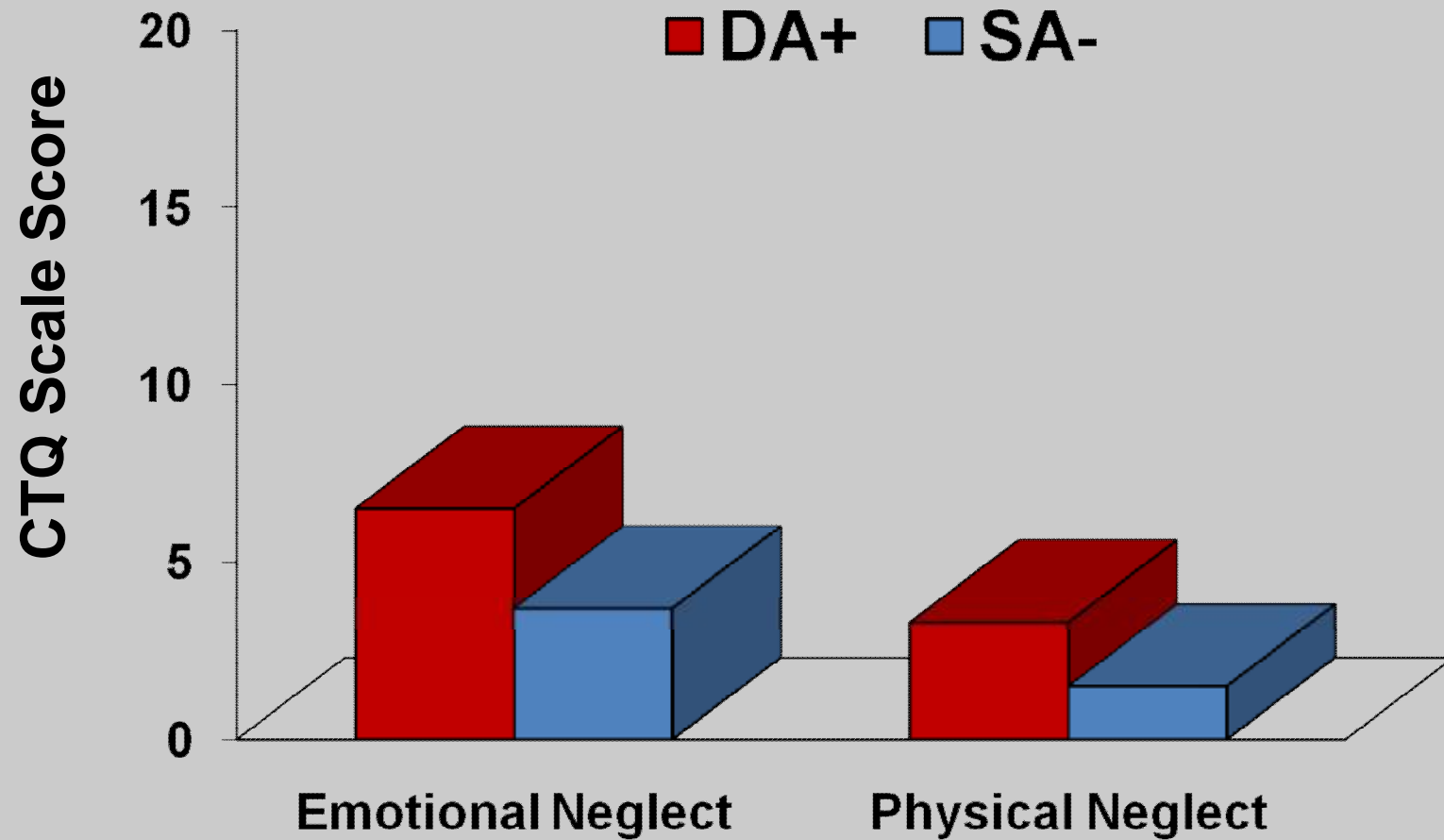
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Stover & McMahon (2010): Developmental Experiences



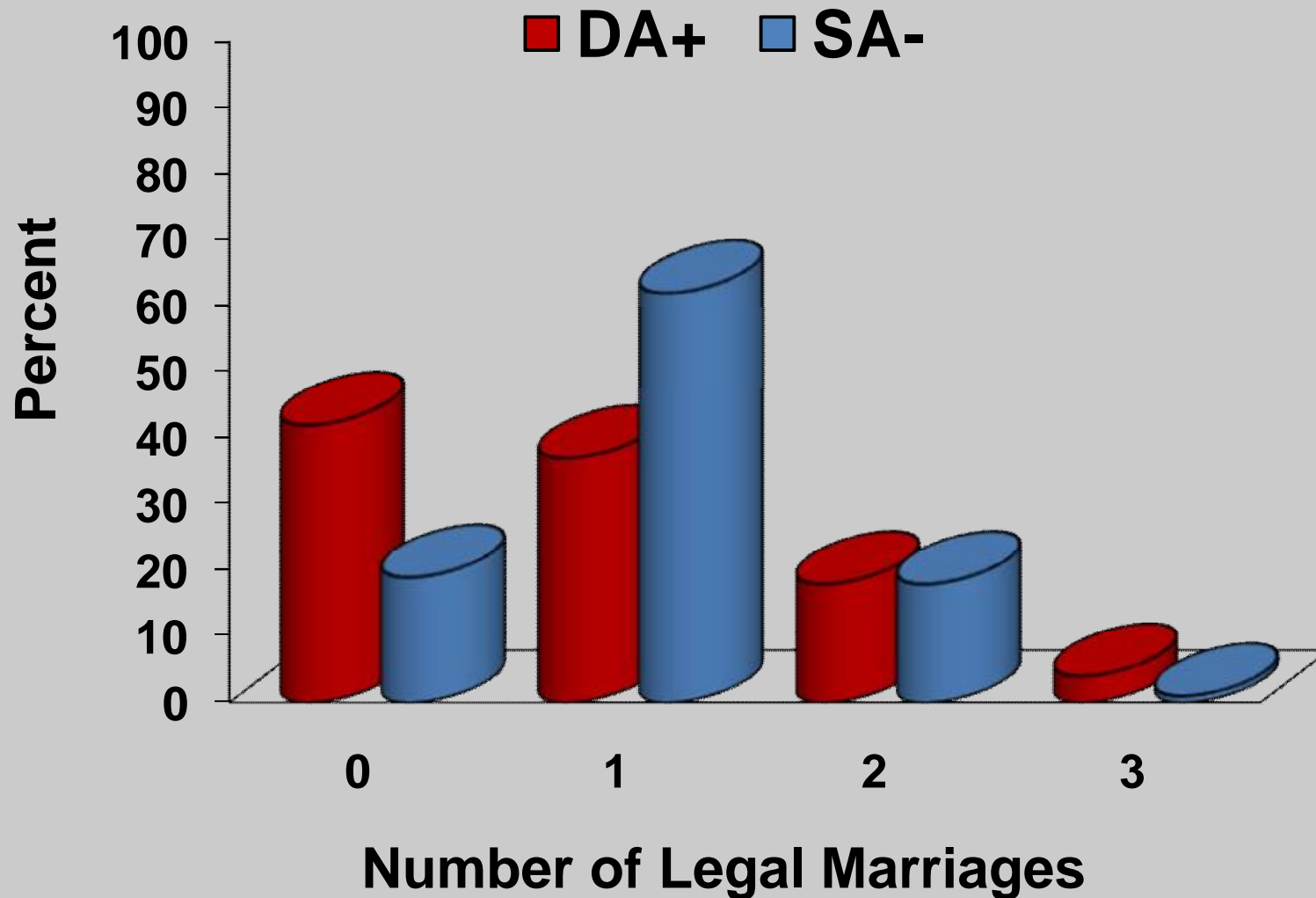
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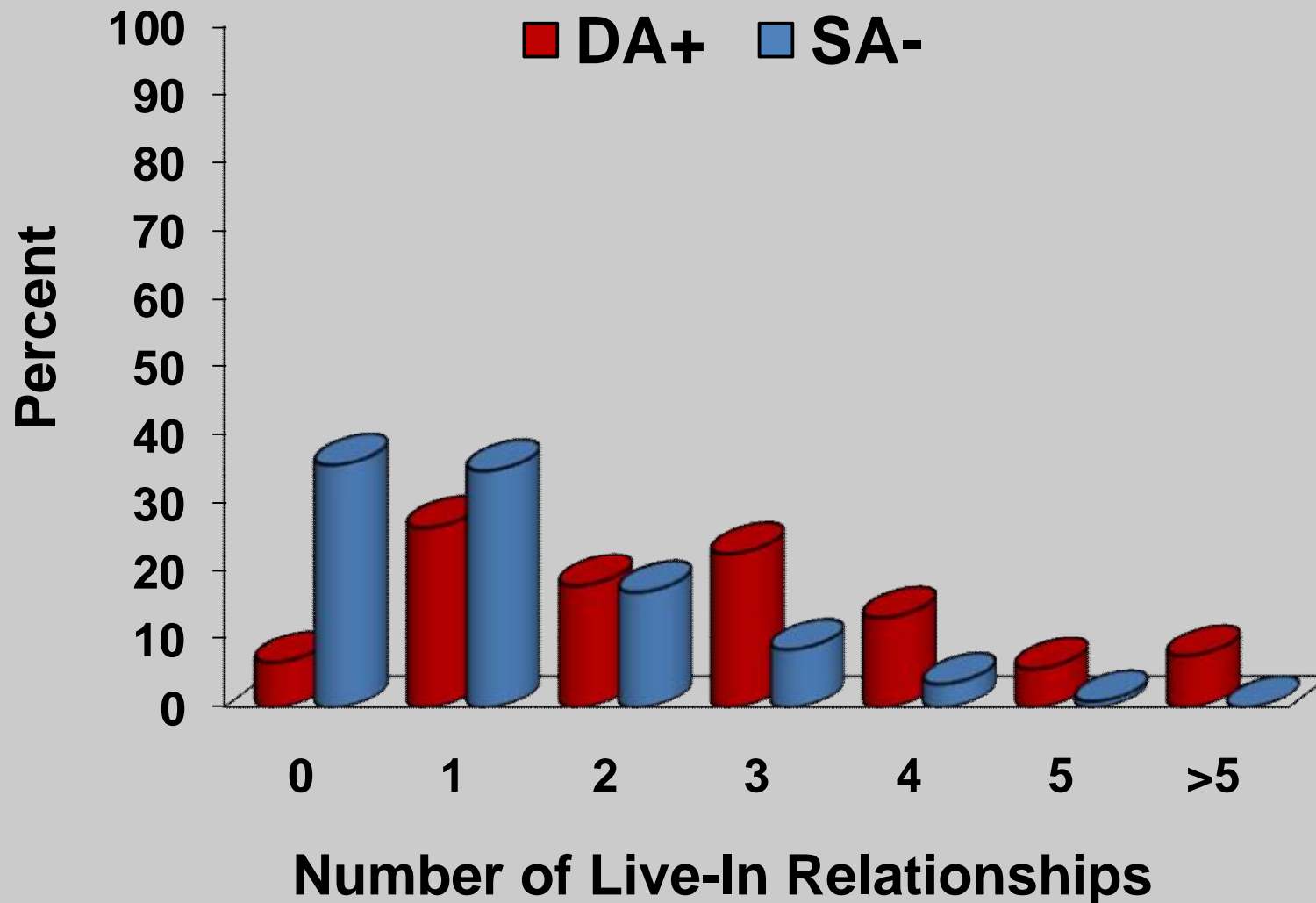


Developmental Experiences of Drug-Abusing Fathers

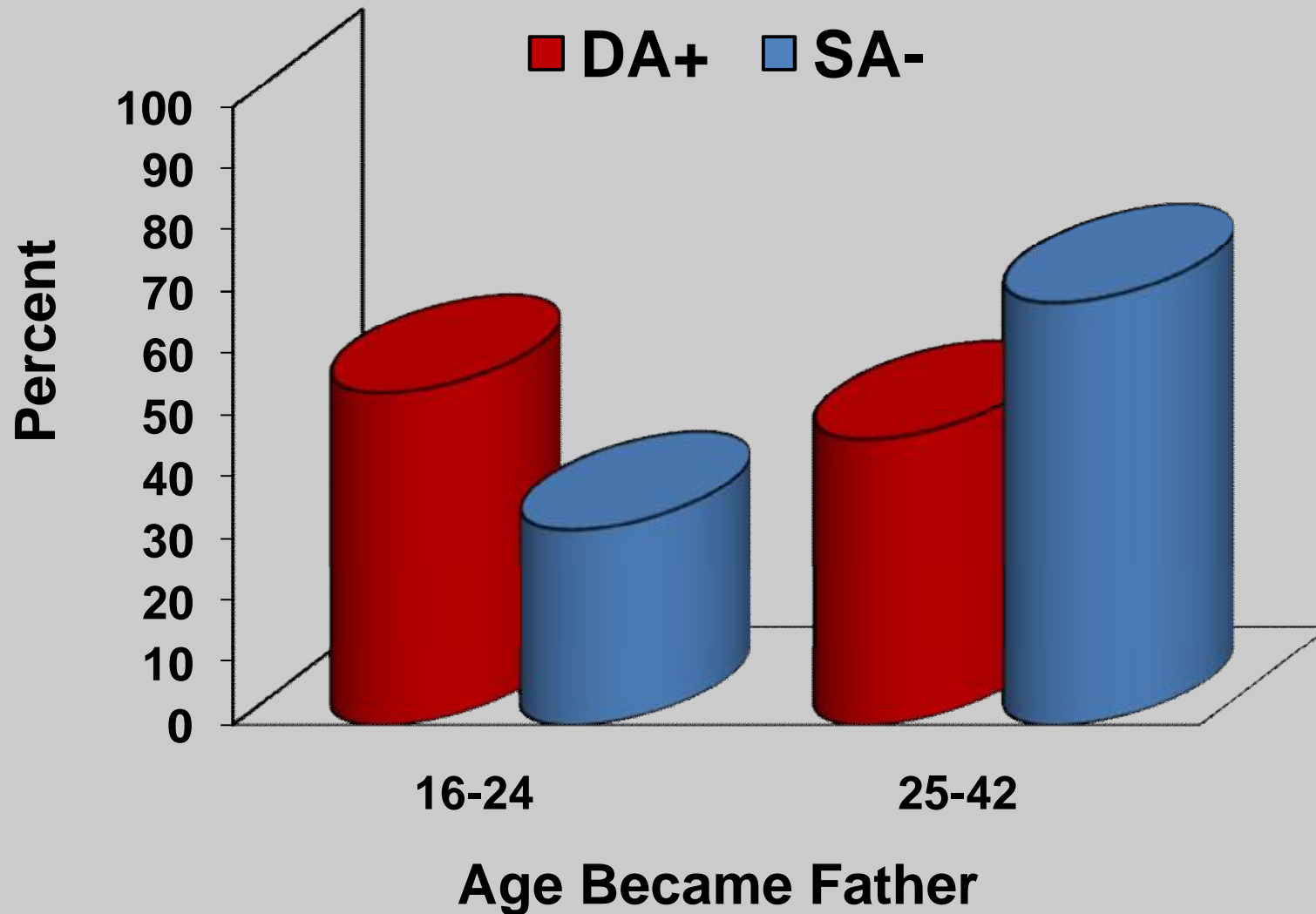
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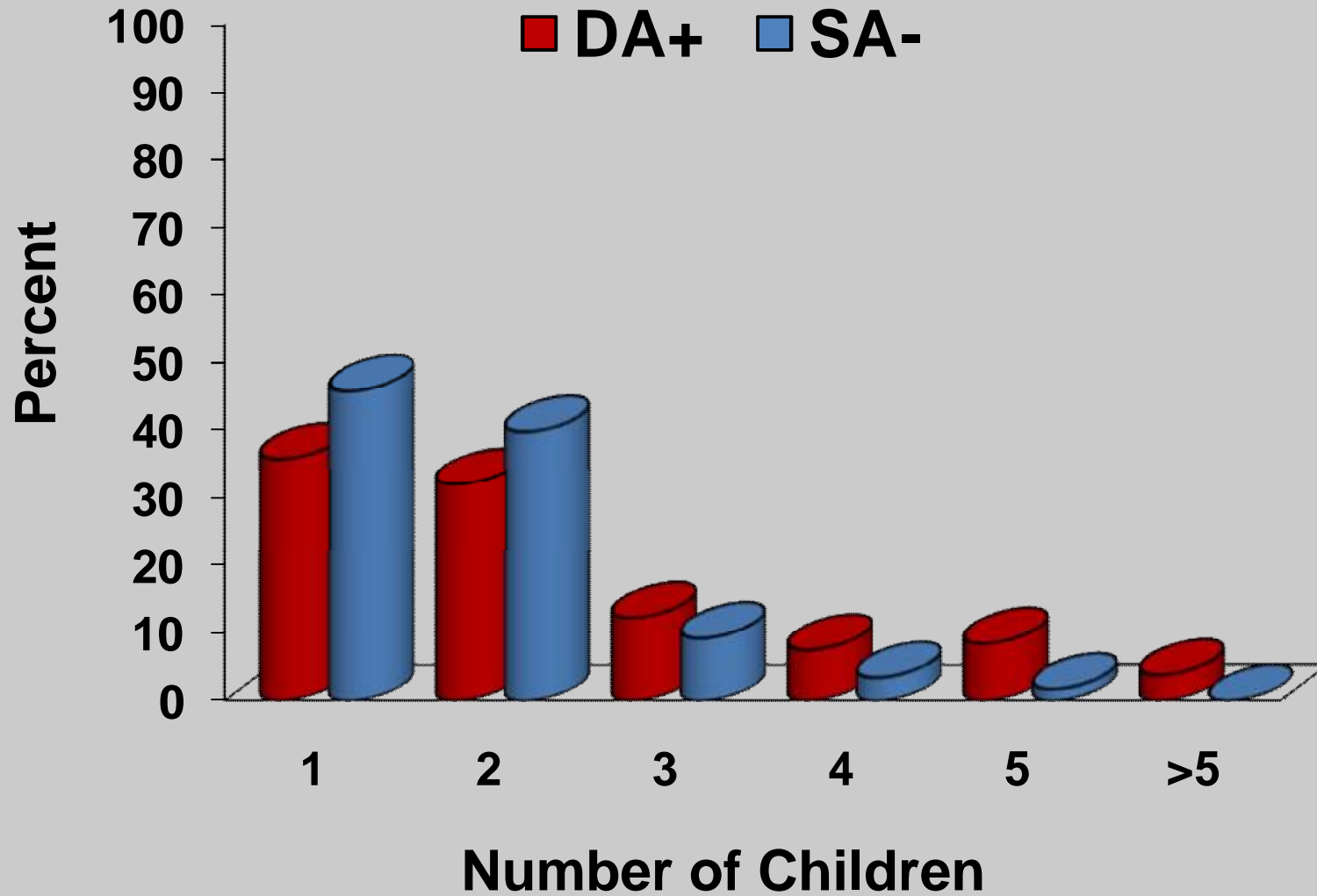
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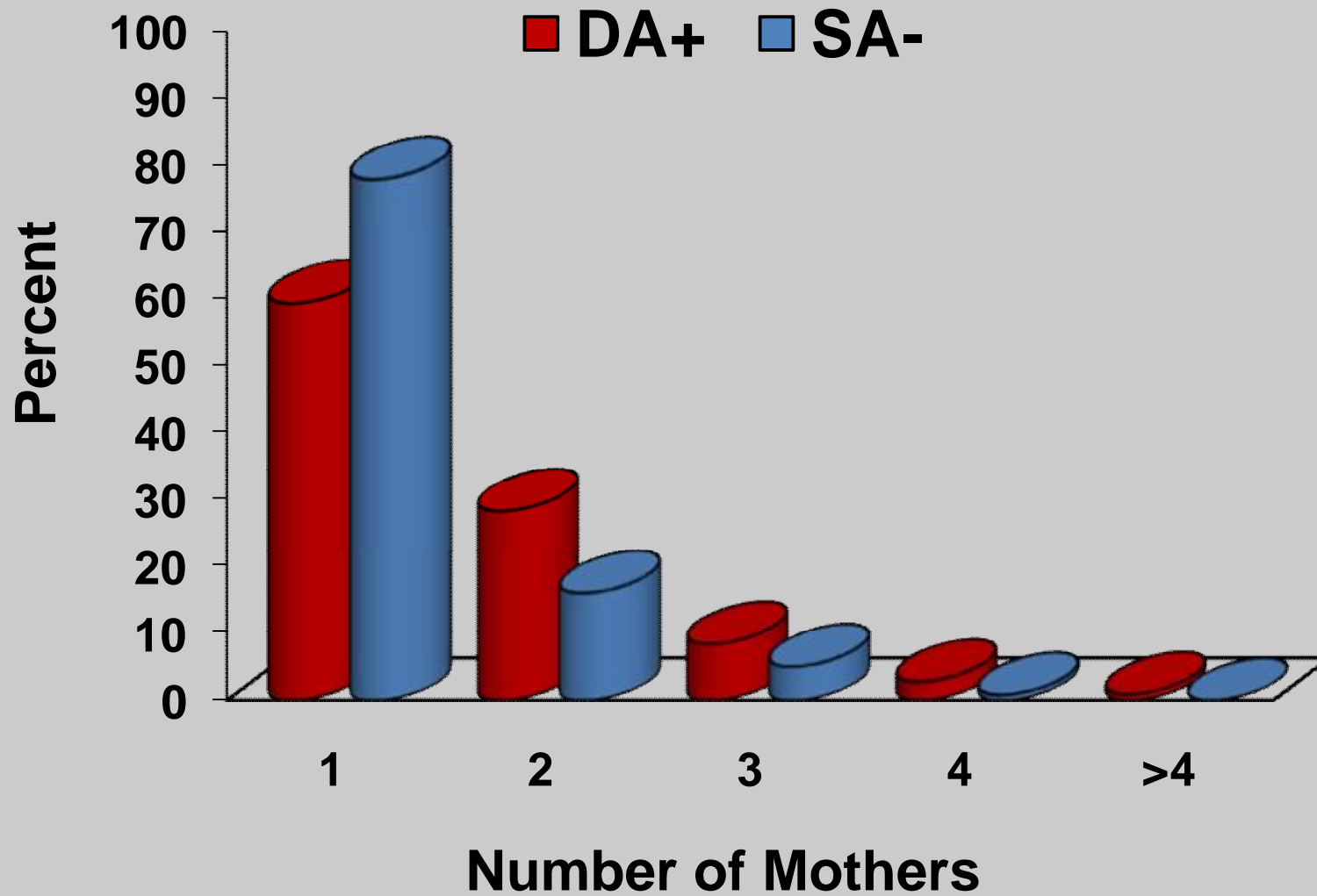
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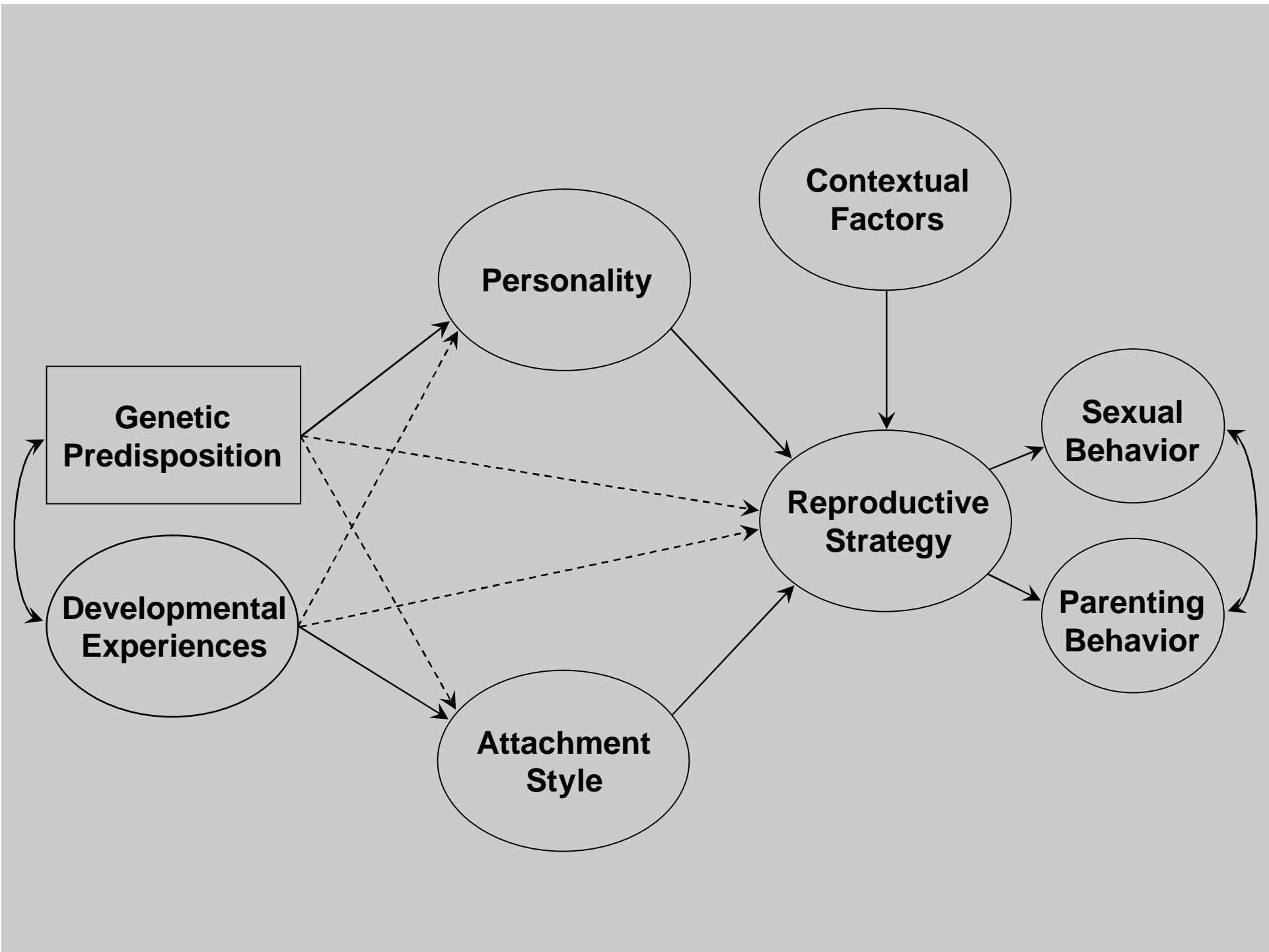


Studying High-Risk Paternity: Substance-Abusing Fathers

The concept of reproductive strategy borrowed from life history theory can help expand understanding of high-risk fathering occurring in the context of ongoing substance abuse...

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Expanding Our Understanding

- **Conceptual framework to promote understanding**
- **Between-group differences**
- **Within-group differences**
- **Developmental perspective**
- **Moving beyond parenting behavior**
- **Neurobiologic + psychosocial influences**
- **Neurobiologic x psychosocial influences**



Studying High-Risk Paternity: Challenges

- **Stereotypes**
- **Response burden**
 - ▶ **Substance abuse**
 - ▶ **Family process**
 - ▶ **Child development**
- **Defining and measuring reproductive strategy**
- **Primary informant: Who speaks for Dad?**
- **Collateral informants**
 - ▶ **Poor coparenting relationships**
 - ▶ **Access to children**

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Taking Another Perspective

○ Individual-based approach

▶ Longer-term orientation

M Complicated by substance abuse

▶ Shorter-term orientation

M Concurrent with substance abuse

○ Qualitative approach

▶ Longer-term narratives

M Complicated by substance abuse

▶ Shorter-term narratives

M Concurrent with substance abuse

Studying High-Risk Paternity: Conceptualizing Intervention

- Empirically informed conceptualization
- Focus on reproductive strategy
- Modular or adaptive approaches to intervention
 - ▶ For fathers with a longer-term orientation
 - M** Guilt, secrets, reparation, reconnecting, loss
 - ▶ For fathers with shorter-term orientation
 - M** Early trauma, shame, relationship-building, pregnancy prevention



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