



Coffee Break Companion

“Learn what the latest research says about adolescent substance abuse in the time it takes to have your coffee break”



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The Article

Title: Risk and protective factors associated with alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use during adolescence

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Introduction

Given the far-reaching effects of substance use among adolescents, it is increasingly important to identify risk and protective factors associated with substance use in this age group. To date, however, little is known about risk and protective factors for specific substances. This article studied the risk and protective factors of three individual substances: alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.

Participants

The participants of the study included 271 adolescents, aged 11-17 years old. All participants had at least one clinical diagnosis with only 7% of the participants being diagnosed with a substance use disorder as their primary clinical diagnosis. The rest of the participants were as follows: 49% diagnosed with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, 21% diagnosed with a mood disorder, 38% diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder, 11% diagnosed with conduct disorder, 4% diagnosed with a learning disorder, 7% diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. “Fifty-six percent of adolescents had at least one co-morbid disorder, with 6% identified as having a co-morbid substance use disorder” (page 379). The authors assert that the study group is demographically representative of adolescents and families with serious emotional disturbance across North Carolina.

Measures

Separate questionnaires/checklists were given to caregivers to ascertain the child and family environment, present risk/protective factors, and adolescent functioning. Risk factors included parental history of felony and parental substance use. Protective factors included family involvement and school functioning.

Substance use was assessed using a questionnaire given to the adolescents themselves. Adolescents were asked if they had ever used any of a list of 12 substances and how often they had used the selected substance in the last 30 days.

Results

The study found that cigarettes were the most frequently used substance, followed by alcohol and marijuana. Adolescents were also most likely to experiment with cigarettes, then marijuana and alcohol (respectively). Adolescents were more likely, however, to *continue* using cigarettes and alcohol than marijuana after the initial use. There was a positive correlation between the substances. This means that use of one substance increased the chance of other substances being use.

Alcohol Use

Older adolescents were found to be the most likely to use alcohol. This study found no distinguishable protective factors to insulate against the use of alcohol. In terms of risk factors, the study found that adolescents who had a parental history of felony were less likely to engage in alcohol consumption.

Cigarette Use

Like alcohol use, older adolescents engaged in cigarette use more than younger adolescents. Unlike alcohol use, however, adolescents who had a parental history of felony were more likely to smoke. Adolescents with high parental behavioral control had a lower frequency of cigarette use.

Marijuana Use

Findings of marijuana use and parental history of felony were consistent with alcohol use; adolescents who reported greater use of marijuana were less likely to have a parental history of felony. Unlike alcohol and cigarette use, however, marijuana using adolescents were more likely to have a parental history of substance use. Higher levels of parental control were linked to lower frequency of marijuana use. Age, however, did not predict the frequency of marijuana use.