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Perspectives on Adolescent Drug Use: Interviews with Community Providers

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INTRODUCTION

- By the year 2020, psychiatric illnesses including substance use disorders will surpass all physical diseases as a major cause of a disability world wide. Even more alarming is half of all these lifetime cases begin by age 14 (Prevention 2018).
- As adolescents start to explore and question their identity, they can also engage in risk taking behaviors such as experimenting with drugs and alcohol (NIDA 2014).
- A study by Feldstein and Miller (2006) explored the co-occurring behaviors of risk taking and substance use by conducting a literature review to determine the factors that contribute to adolescent substance abuse and correlated risk-taking behaviors.
 - They found that among adolescents, substance abuse occurs as part of multiple problems and risk taking behaviors. Predisposing factors included genetics, parenting, and peer behaviors among other things.
 - The literature indicated that treatment for substance-related problems should include evaluation of other risk-taking behaviors and social functioning.
- Programs such as Prime for Life at Recovery Resources promote the well-being of individuals by focusing on educating, and building skills for a healthy lifestyle (Addiction 2018).
- This study sought to understand why and how early adolescents get involved in substance use from the perspectives of community providers in order to understand how to prevent alcohol and drug use in youth.

METHOD

In an ongoing study, N=4 community providers: a parent, adolescent, prevention specialist, and a high school teacher participated in a 30-45 minute audio-recorded interview with a research assistant. Guided questions revolved around adolescent substance use as well as use in their communities.

Partnerships

Partnering with Recovery Resources researchers were able to get a baseline understanding of the programs for substance use prevention are already in place as well as observe many of these programs firsthand.

Theme #1: Motivations for teen substance use

Responses for why adolescents decide to use drugs:

- To cope with stress or trauma
- To feel good and relax
- Curiosity
- Mimic what's being modeled in the home
- To fit in or be 'cool'

Theme #2: Teen access to drugs and alcohol

Responses for where adolescents get drugs:

- Through peers or friends
- Through older family members
- Through prescription pills

Theme #3: Perception of Teen Attitudes

Responses for adolescent attitudes of drugs:

- Most interview discussions were revolved around marijuana use where the views described marijuana as "not that bad"
- Using drugs is predominantly a social activity if they are not already being used to cope because they are not a big deal.

"I think peers are number one definitely when you're talking about middle school/high school age young people and they are definitely getting it from their peers you know that person that's introducing it to them after school"

"I think when our young people are first being introduced to it and using it, I do think a lot of it does stem from 'I'm intrigued, peer offered it to me', and then I think overtime it's kind of like 'this will help me to relax'"

"But otherwise you don't hear a lot about that because since it's almost so normalized if someone has an overdose you're not just going to write a whole story about them because it's just one person"

"Well it's (marijuana) becoming seen, most people assume it will be legal fairly shortly and so it's an interesting topic of conversation then with kids, how to think about it and they should think about it and its widely available"

"The safest environment for a child is an environment that doesn't offer them anything that could harm them"

Limitations & Findings

While themes were able to be drawn from the four interviews conducted, recruiting participants for this study was a challenge due to various reasons. As more research is conducted, it is expected to strengthen the themes already in place for understanding adolescent substance use.

References

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