The Relationship of Social Environment to Cigarette, Alcohol and Marijuana Use among Adolescents in the United States: Gender and Racial/Ethnic Differences

Abstract

Purpose: The goal of this study was to examine the extent to which gender and race/ethnicity mediates or moderates social environment's impact on cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use among adolescents. Methodology: Data for this study were abstracted from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The study sample consisted of all adolescents (ages 12--17) surveyed as part of the NHSDA (N = 17,429). The information abstracted from the NHSDA included self-reported cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use, gender, race/ethnicity, age and social environment (i.e., parental influences, peer influences, and school influences). Results: Thirty-three percent of the population reported cigarette use; 43% reported alcohol use and 19% reported marijuana use. Males and females reported similar proportions for cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use. Whites reported the highest proportion of drug use for cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. Much of the study sample perceived having a positive social environment. This impacted substance use in that higher proportions reported never using substances when their social environment was positive. Peers factors were influential more often than parent and school factors. When gender, race and age were included in the regression analysis with social environment, results imply that gender and race moderate the association between social environment and of substance use. Conclusion: These findings suggest that additional research is warranted in this area because there is significant drug use despite a recent decline for the drugs included in this study (cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana). Social environment factors are important for future research, particularly peer influences on substance use. The fact that gender differences were not significant, except for alcohol use, implies that female substance use has increased.