

Abstract

Associations between community attachments and adolescent substance use in nationally representative samples

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Purpose

Social capital and social attachment theories of substance use argue that positive bonds to society and the conventional values they promote deter adolescents from substance use. Using nationally representative samples of U.S. high school seniors, we hypothesized that adolescents' community attachments, measured by social trust, social responsibility, and religiosity, would be negatively associated with lifetime and 30-day substance use.

Method

We used repeated cross-sectional nationally representative high school senior data from 1976 to 2008 Monitoring the Future Study cohorts (weighted $N = 64,246$; 51.6% female). Participation rate ranged from 77% to 86% across years. A series of multiple linear and logistic regressions examined unique associations of adolescents' social trust, social responsibility, and religiosity with lifetime and 30-day use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, hallucinogens, cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, tranquilizers, and narcotics. Models controlled for gender, race, college aspirations, high school grades, parents' education, and survey year.

Results

Social trust, social responsibility, and religiosity showed independent negative associations with use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and six other types of drugs. After accounting for controls, community attachments related to lower lifetime and past 30-day use. Associations were consistent across measures, except social responsibility was not associated with binge drinking or lifetime illicit drugs besides marijuana.

Conclusions

Study strengths included nationally representative samples, diverse substance use measures, and inclusion of controls. We extend theory by suggesting that distinct aspects of adolescents' community attachments uniquely relate to lower substance use. Results suggest potential public health benefits of integrating promotion of community attachments with substance use prevention.

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