

Research on Causes of Teenager Substance Abuse

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Abstract: Substance abuse among adolescents has become a growing global social problem. Due to the incomplete psychological development, teenagers are more likely to do dangerous behaviors such as using drug and alcohol. This article focuses on identifying the causes of substance abuse among teenagers. This research use literature review, analyzing existing research on teenagers substance use. The study examines the causes of substance abuse among adolescents from three perspectives: individual factors (including mental health, trait curiosity, and conscientiousness), environmental factors (such as peer and family influence), and social factors (including media exposure and the effectiveness of social control systems). The findings indicate that substance abuse is not caused by a single factor but rather results from the complex interplay of multiple influences.

Keywords: adolescent substance abuse; risk behavior; environmental influences; prevention strategies

1. Introduction

Now, substance abuse among adolescents has become an increasingly serious social issue worldwide. Substance abuse means using a drug in amounts or by methods that are harmful to an individual or others. Teenagers are people who during adolescence, their mind and body are not completely mature, lacking self-control. As a result, teenagers are a group of people who are easier to have substance abuse. However, most studies focus only on single factors instead of on how these influences interact with each other. This makes the treatment for substance abuse only exist from a single perspective, rather than comprehensive intervention. The research topic of this article is the causes of adolescent substance addiction. It will conduct a literature review on the main causes of substance addiction that currently exist and point out areas for expansion in current research. This article compiles six pieces on the causes of substance abuse of teenagers to analyze the current progress and shortcomings now. Studying the causes of substance addiction among teenagers can effectively prevent and stop them from falling into substance addiction, thereby reducing the rate of substance addiction among adults. Besides, this article answer the questions of how do individual, environmental and social factors contributing to substance abuse among teenagers, which has significant meaning for effective prevention strategies. This research can help educators, parents, and people in other fields design more targeted methods of intervention and therapy.

2. The Main Organizing Framework

Teenagers' substance addiction is mainly related to three major factors: personal factors, living environment factors, and social environment factors. Among them, personal factors are divided into personal psychological status, sense of responsibility and curiosity. Living environment factors are divided into peer influence and

family-related factors. Social environment factors are divided into media influence and social control system influence. Social environment factors are divided into the influence of the media and the influence of social control systems.

2.1. Summary of Existing Achievements

2.1.1. Personal Mental Health

Substance abuse among adolescents is rarely an isolated behavior. Research shows that substance abuse often coexists with mental health problems. According to Kelly and Daley, teenagers who already get depression, anxiety, PTSD or ADHD are more likely to develop substance abuse [1]. They engage in substance abuse as a form of self-medication. At the same time, the substance abuse will aggravate psychological problems. During adolescence, teenagers face immense pressure from academics, social interactions and other aspects, making them more vulnerable to substance abuse and mental health issues. Therefore, it suggests that medical practitioners and relevant practitioners should implement effective interventions that not only curb substance use, but also alleviate teenagers' psychological distress and emotional regulation disorders. Connecting psychotherapy with medication use therapy is essential to better prevent their impact on the lives of adolescents

2.1.2. Curiosity and Conscientiousness

Personality plays a vital role in determining whether adolescents develop substance abuse tendencies. One of the prominent personality traits is sensation seeking, which refers to the pursuit of intense experiences and risky behaviors driven by curiosity. Escamilla et al. found that curious and impulsive adolescents are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including experimenting with alcohol and illicit drugs. In contrast, people have conscientiousness, which means self-discipline, responsibility, can control themselves better to stop using substance [2]. Because they can protect themselves in front of peer pressure and other tempts, to plan for their future and follow the social policy. Self-controlling is balancing the impulsion and the drugs abuse.

2.1.3. Peer Guidance

Peer influence is one of the most influential contributing factors in adolescent substance abuse. During adolescence, teenagers develop extensive social connections, making peer relationships far more complex. According to Loke and Mak, the peer pressure usually come from three ways [3]. First, the friends encourage them to using new drugs. Sometimes it is forces to do and sometimes it is indirect. Second, adolescents who seek entry into certain social circles or peer groups may voluntarily use substances. They thinks using drugs as a way of getting friendships. Third, imitation occurs when teenagers observe their peers using substance and they copy the behavior, especially when these peers hold higher social status within the group. And importantly, peer influence is not just limited in one direction. Since teenagers tend to associate with like-minded peers, a vicious cycle of deviant social groups will form, further promoting substance abuse. As explored by Shakya et al., the substance using will spread with social internet and it is really important to having interventions targeting friends groups instead of just individuals [4].

2.1.4. Family Factors

As a core part of adolescent growth, family factors exert the most profound and long-term impact on substance abuse. Moradi et al. started a research, finding several dangerous factor about family [5]. The most significant one is the lack of parental roles, which means fathers or mothers are absent in grows of children. When one or both parents are absent, adolescents cannot obtain sufficient emotional support and guidance, making it hard for them to establish a stable emotional regulation system. In the same time, the ineffective discipline methods also effect the teenagers. Some family choose the discipline method with strict punishment or abuse, which can increase rebelliousness and substance use of teenagers. But instead, if a family choose a way too loose, the teenagers will can't determine what they can do and what they can't, the dangerous behavior will still happen. Especially after school and weekend, the teenagers still have chance to using substance.

Besides that, the family factor will effect more family due to ‘social network spillover effect’. Shakya et al. found that teenagers who have good relationship with their parents, and their friends also have good relationship with parents has less possibility of using substance [4]. It shows how significant for parents to focus on their children and the social circle of their children.

2.1.5. Media Influence

In the digital age, media has really powerful influence on adolescent behavior. Traditional media, such as movies and television, described substance use as a cool behavior, having glamorous and rebellious. Scull et al. demonstrate that media exposure greatly influences adolescents, leading them to regard substance use as normal and trendy behavior., even their family or peer has teaching them that is not [6]. As the same time, social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, have introduced new dimensions of the influence. Wu et al. found that social media exposure increase the touch of children and drugs [7]. In addition, teenagers may make friends with deviant peers who provide drugs or encourage them to use substances. The interactivity of social media is able to let teenagers think using drugs, a dangerous action, is really normal and risky.

2.1.6. Social Control System

Social control systems, including laws, regulations and so on, shape the availability of substances. Simons-Morton et al. had a research of comparing adolescent drinking and cannabis use in the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands, which shows the significant differences in policy effectiveness [8]. Strict alcohol policies are correlated with lower adolescent alcohol consumption rates, while the correlation between policies and cannabis use is far less direct. For the country which don’t have strict policy on cannabis, like Netherlands, the using rate is not significantly higher than other countries. It shows just having strict policy is not enough, stopping substance abuse also need effort on other methods. In China, drugs policies are among the strictest in the world, and the use of marijuana remains illegal. However, alcohol abuse remains a significant problem among Chinese teenagers. Huang et al. have a national survey and found that alcohol using problem is prevalent, with early ages and high rates of being drinking [9]. Since alcohol is culturally and socially accepted, strict policies can curb the spread of illicit drugs but fail to restrain adolescent alcohol abuse. The difference between effective of drugs and alcohol policy shows that Solving the problem of drug abuse needs to be based on the cultural background of different countries.

3. Research Gaps and Theoretical Blind Spots

Despite the rich body of literature on teenagers substance abuse, several significant gaps remain. First, most of the research focuses on a single domain, such as family or peers, without adequately examining how these factors interact with each other. For example, family factors may cause teenagers to make deviant friends and abuse drugs under peer encouragement. At the same time, new social media also makes teenagers more likely to fall into deviant social circles. Existing studies fail to analyze these mechanisms in depth and establish a sound theoretical framework. Second, for the new social media, like Tik Tok and Instagram, they have complex system and new information, and having big difference with traditional social media. The research don’t find more about how these social media let teenagers touch the information of drugs, and how it promote interaction among peers. Third, for the family factor, most research just talking about the lack of mother role is lack of emotional support and lack of father role is lack of tutor. In reality, families have diverse parental occupational backgrounds, yet existing research rarely explores how these differences exert long-term impacts. Forth, in China, as marijuana and other illicit drugs are illegal, it is difficult to finding data and doing research. As a result, people can’t know that if the strict policy really decrease the rate of using drugs. People can’t different the lower data is a consequence of policy or the pressure of law. Fifth, the cross-cultural comparisons remain underemployed. Most research is under the Western context, the findings may not be applicable to China and other Asian societies. Most Asian society has bigger family, special alcohol culture, and special family tutor methods. As a result, it is better to doing research in different social culture background, compare them to

finding the Risk factors that are widespread and specific to certain cultures.

4. Follow-Up Study

For the follow-up study, future research should focus on constructing integrated models to explore the relationships among individual, family, peer, media and social control factors. This type of research should be based on individual case analysis, and explore how these factors interact collectively and contribute to substance abuse. Additionally, it is essential to explore how new social media affect adolescent behaviour. Researchers can use questionnaires to screen out which Internet factors will exacerbate drug abuse. In the Chinese context, there remain unique challenges for relevant research. For research on marijuana use in China, researchers can adopt innovative data collection methods, such as anonymous surveys or interviews with drug rehabilitation centers, which may help to address the gap. Besides, due to the high rate of teenagers' alcohol use, research should focus on how Chinese culture influences alcohol abuse.

5. Conclusions

All in all, adolescent substance abuse is a multifaceted issue, which is shaped by a complex interplay of individual, familial, peer and socio-environmental factors. Individual traits shape personal characteristics and determine vulnerability to substance abuse. Family and peer influences shape the immediate social environment. Media and social control systems construct a broader social environment. These factors do not function in isolation but reinforce and interact with one another. Although existing research has made significant progress in exploring these factors, as time evolves, new social phenomena continue to emerge, and the connections between various influencing factors have become increasingly complex. Further research is required to clarify the mechanisms underlying substance abuse. By addressing issues such as the impact of new media, cross-cultural comparisons, and the effects of strict policies on substance use, future research will be able to deeply and comprehensively understand adolescent substance abuse and provide theoretical guidance and practical support for adolescents.

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