

Adolescents' Externalizing Problem of Substance Use and the Reasons Behind

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Abstract: This paper mainly discusses the externalizing problem of adolescence, specifically the problem of substance use. Based on the research done to study adolescent psychology, the problems that occur during adolescence are mainly distinguished into two categories: the externalizing problem and the internalizing problem. Externalizing problems refers to problems that influence the external world. While internalizing problems refers to the problems that influence the internal world of the adolescent. Substance use is one of the most common externalizing problems occurring during adolescence. It is defined as the use of materials that can alter your mood and cognition, which are often addictive. For instance, substance use includes using drug, alcohol and smoke. The data and studies in this paper are all adopted from other researchers or organizations, focusing on adolescents ageing between 10 to 18. This paper indicates that there is a high rate of substance use all across the world and substance use is mainly carried out in four types, including experimental substance use, social substance use, medicinal substance use, and addictive substance use. And the causes of substance use can be distinguished into two types, including socialization causes and individual causes. For socialization costs, this paper includes explanations of how family relationships, family structure, parental teaching, friend influence, and others influence the substance use rate of teenagers and adolescents. And for individual causes, this essay analyzes how low impulse control, gender, personality and optimism influence the rate of substance use among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescence, Externalizing problem, Substance use, Society, Individual

1. Introduction

Adolescence, conventionally defined as the period from the initiation of puberty to one's complete development of social independence, is when teenagers between the age of 10 to 18 experience puberty and mental changes. However, psychological and spiritual problems are fostered during adolescence. Researchers of the field distinguish such problems into two types: internalizing problems and externalizing problems. Internalizing problems refer to problems affecting one's internal world chiefly, for instance, depression and anxiety. While externalizing problems mainly affect the external world, or the environment, around the experienter[1]. Substance use is an externalizing problem which occurs among adolescents with relatively high frequency. This paper will include discussion of the different usages of substance and the reasons behind the establishment

of substance use in adolescence. It serves as an informative piece on substance abuse by gathering and summarizing data and studies from published works.

2. Substance Use

The following discussions focus on explaining the nature of substance use as an externalizing problem, evidence of the high rate of such activity and the four types of substance use.

2.1. Substance Use: An Externalizing Problem

Substance use is the use of substances that affects one's cognition and mood. Such substances are mostly addictive, including alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs[1]. Substance use is categorized into externalizing problem because it disturbs the environment around the taker. Taking in substances that are addictive and capable of altering one's cognition and mood can affect the health of the taker to a great extent. It also has a significant effect on the environment and the external world. For example, because drunk alcohol users act without thinking about the consequences of their actions, they can cause serious problems in society.

2.2. High Rate of Substance Use

Unfortunately, the rate of adolescents committing substance use is very high in every country. Through investigation of adolescents in various countries, researchers acknowledged the fact that weekly alcohol use among 15-year-old boys in 12 countries averages above 10 percent, while the average percentage of 15-year-old girls committing alcohol use weekly is also above 5 percent (Figure 1). This investigation suggests a high rate of alcohol use among 15 years old adolescents in many countries across the world. Besides the use of alcohol, the rate of cigarette smoking among 15 years old adolescents is also high. The average percentage of 15 years old adolescent using cigarette at least once a week in different countries is above 10 percent. Further details in the investigation suggests that 30 percent of girls in Bulgaria uses cigarette once a week. While 20 percent of boys in Italy uses cigarette once a week (figure 2). Furthermore, the average percentage of using Marijuana among 15 years old adolescents in the past 30 days of the investigation across countries is above 6 percent among boys and girls. In US, about 15 percent of the boys uses Marijuana in the past 30 days of their investigation (figure 3). These numbers are not low. Substance use is devastating both to the takers themselves and the external world. The question is, knowing the damage of substance use, why are adolescents still using them?

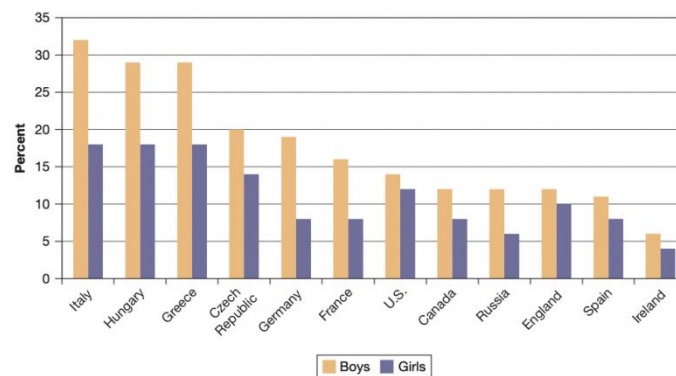


Figure 1: Alcohol use among 15-year-olds, weekly[2].

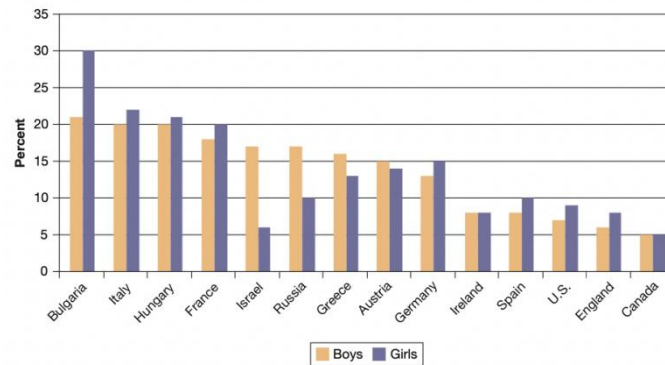


Figure 2: Cigarette smoking among 15-year-olds, at least once a week [3].

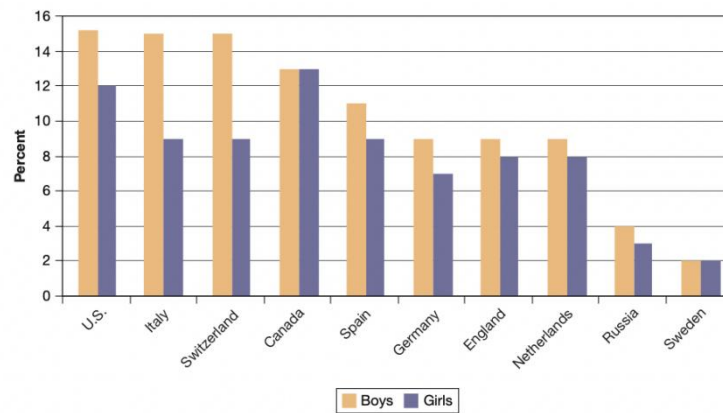


Figure 3: Marijuana use among 15-year-olds, past 30 days [4].

2.3. Four Types of Substance Use

To answer the question, we first need to know the four types of substance use in adolescence, namely experimental substance use, social substance use, medicinal substance use, and addictive substance use. Experimental substance use is when adolescents try the substance out of curiosity for the first time and become addictive to it afterwards. This kind of substance use accounts for a high percentage of substance use among adolescents [1]. Adolescents are curious of what they taste like because they have seen other people doing it, either in real life or in social media. Social substance use refers to the using of substance of adolescents during social activities with others. The use of substances is often included in group activities at social parties. Adolescents are more likely to try substances under the influence of social partners [5]. Medicinal substance use is the use of substance for the sake of releasing mental or physical distresses. For example, under anxiety, pressure, sadness, or loneliness, teenagers are likely to take alcohol to relieve the emotional agony [6]. In other words, adolescents use substances for self-medication. Lastly, addictive substance use is when an adolescent tries the substance once and finds themselves with withdrawal symptoms when not using it. Thus, they must consistently use the substance to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

3. Reasons Why Adolescents Commit Substance Use

The following discussion introduces the causes of adolescents' activity in substance use from two aspects: socialization causes and individual causes.

3.1. Causes of Substance Use: Socialization Cause

There are two types of causes of substance use, including socialization and individual factors. Socialization causes refer to the causes produced by society and the outer environment, such as family environment, school environment, and a social circle of the person. Another type of cause is the individual cause. Individual causes refer to the causes that are exclusive to the inherent characteristics of adolescents, which they are born with or develop afterwards. The socialization causes are mostly related to family.

The family relationship is the first socialization cause of substance use. A family is usually made up of a mom, a dad, and a child. A family relationship is a broad concept that includes the level of intimacy between parents and children as well as the frequency with which they communicate. Adolescents are born under the influence of family relationship, so the quality and quantity of such relationship is essential to the development of adolescents. If there are problems in the communication and the intimacy between parents and children, there is a higher possibility for children to develop externalizing problems such as substance use. For example, if there is a lack of communication between family members, then the parents are less likely to notice when their children are taking substances. Thus, they are not able to stop children from continuously taking the substance. Another example is that when children are facing negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, they won't communicate with the parents due to the lack of communication in this family, leading to the result that they can't relieve their agony with others help. So their only way to relieve themselves from the negative emotion is to take substance. Conclusively, the lack of intimacy and communication inhibits parents from noticing the substance taking action of the children and stops children from seeking for help.

Second, another influential socialization cause of substance use is family conflict. Children may experience negative emotions as a result of conflict within the family or between the parents. Furthermore, if the family structure is not complete, for example, if their parents divorce or their mother remarries, children may be more vulnerable to negative emotions as they grow up in such a repressed environment. These negative emotions are all contributing factors to substance use. Children and adolescents who are depressed or anxious are more likely to use substances such as alcohol and drugs to make themselves feel better because substances have the ability to alter their emotion and mood.

Other than family relationship and family structure, parenting style is also essential when it comes to substance use of adolescents. Parenting style refers to the way in which parents teach their children, or the performance of parents that might cause their children to follow and perform in the same way as the parents. There are three types of parenting style that are very influential to the substance use of adolescents: First, if the parents totally neglect the children and don't care anything about their children, then their children are more likely to involve in substance using activity. Secondly, if the parent offers complete freedom to the children, then their children are also more likely to involve in substance use. In this case, parents won't judge, criticize or teach their children, no matter what they do. Even if they involve in activities that are both damaging for themselves and the society, their parents tell them not to do so. Consequently, adolescents growing up in complete freedom don't know what is right and what is wrong, which increases their opportunity to engage in substance use. Lastly, if the parents are too manipulative towards the children, it also might trigger adolescents to act right against them. In other words, if the parents control everything the children do, then the adolescents might do things that they know is wrong in order to stand up against their parents and show their disobedient. While knowing that substance using is one of these bad actions to do, they might purposely do that in order to rebel against their parents [7].

Friend's influence might also increase the rate of substance use. If an adolescent's friends and peers at school all use substances, this adolescent is more likely to engage in a similar activity as his friend in order to maintain friendship and become more involved in the circle.. Finally, other factors like social media or news can also affect whether adolescents engage in substance using activity or not. Through social media and news, specially the ones with inappropriate context, adolescents are exposed to a higher range of substance using activity, and they are likely to mimic such activity themselves. For example, if a TV show performs a celebrity using substances, the adolescents watching the TV show might mimic the action of these celebrities, especially when they are fans of them. Conversely, filtering and selecting the appropriate context performed on social media can, to some extent, decrease the rate of adolescents' use of substance.

3.2. Causes of Substance Use: Individual Cause

Individual causes of substance use include gender, personality, optimism, and low impulse control. Based on investigations, males have a higher rate of committing substance use crimes than females on average. In general, males have a higher rate of experiencing externalizing problems than females. While females have a higher rate of experiencing internalizing problems than males, As shown in Figures 1 and 3, boys have a higher percentage of alcohol and marijuana use than females almost in every country. But gender isn't the only measuring factor. Personality is another crucial factor influencing the rate of substance use among adolescents. Adolescents with a more aggressive and risk-taking personality experience externalizing problems at a higher rate. In addition, adolescents with a more rebellious personality might also engage in more substance-using activities.

Adolescents who are more optimistic might use more substance. Since they are optimistic, they might believe that the using of drug and other substances are less harmful to their body than they really are. They also might believe that trying such addictive substance for only one time won't get themselves addicted to them. However, many of them might end up being addicted to the substance after trying it. These are all possible outcomes of being optimistic, which increases the possibility for adolescents to use substance.

Low impulse control mean that the adolescents are not able to control themselves from doing the wrong thing. They can't fulfill their desire or impulse of committing actions only after considering about the impact. With less consideration and faster acting, these adolescents are more likely to use substance and experience other externalizing problems.

4. Conclusion

The causes of substance use can be distinguished into two types, including socialization causes and individual causes. Socialization costs, family relationships, family structure, parental teaching, friend influence, and other influences can affect the rate of substance use among teenagers and adolescents. And for individual causes, low impulse control, gender, personality and optimism can influence the rate of substance use among adolescents. However, this essay is exclusive to the theory and the reasoning behind development of substance use. There is a lack of the biological and cognitive developmental reasons of such externalizing problem. In addition, this essay doesn't fully explain why the adolescents, typically, experience externalizing problems like substance use. And it will be more descriptive if the detail of damages and possible solutions to substance use is sufficiently described. It is very important for everyone, especially parents and adolescents, to acknowledge that externalizing and internalizing problems among teenagers and adolescents are very severe and should be treated with full seriousness. These problems occurring during adolescence are devastating to not only the external world, but most importantly, the adolescents

themselves. Future studies of the field might focus specifically on possible solution that are effective towards diminishing substance use among adolescents.

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