**Adult Substance Abuse: Adolescent and Adult Risk Factors**

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**Abstract**

This is a study to determine the risk factors of middle age substance abuse by looking at adolescent and middle age predictors. Predictors in adolescents include family structure, parental use, social networks, and socioeconomic status. Risk factors in middle age adults include previous use of illict drugs, socioeconomic status, social networks. Data will be collected from individuals 18-49 years old through a self administered cross sectional questionnaire using a statistical analysis. Questions will be drawn from previous studies on adult drug abuse and the National Survey for Drug Use and Health. Questions will be recoded for statistical analysis for three age groups 18-25, 26-34 and 35-49.

This is a study to determine the risk factors of substance abuse in middle age Americans by considering adulthood predictors and the impact of adolescent substance use. The purpose is to examine the risk factors associated to the use of cocaine, prescription pills and heavy drinking in middle adulthood. Risk factors in adolescence that predict substance abuse in middle adulthood include individual characteristics, adolescent substance abuse, social group influences, deviancy, education and family influences (Merline, Jager, & Schulenberg, 2008). Risk factors in middle adulthood that lead to substance abuse that are examined are race, marital status, financial status, employment status, education, parental status and gender (Merline, O'Malley, Schulenberg, Bachman, & Johnston, 2004).

This study is to inform other scholarly researchers by compiling various studies and create an overall conclusion of adolescent and adult risk factors in adult substance abuse. This study is of importance to not only scholarly researchers but to parents who are studying about adolescent and adult influences in predicting substance abuse in their adolescence or young adult. This information is valuable to sociologist, psychologist, counselors and other researchers.

This article is worthy of scientific attention because it is determining the risk factors that lead to adult substance abuse. This research can help in letting researchers know how to use and teach preventive measures in avoiding this problem. This research can help to provide the most influential risk factor in adolescence and in adulthood that lead to this epidemic. As times change and adult and adolescent behaviors and experiences differ there is still a steady increase in adult substance abuse.

**Miniature Literature Review**

According to existing research from the National Panel data that was drawn from the Monitoring the Future Study using logistic regressions, evidence shows that individuals who have not initiated drug use by the age of 20 are unlikely to initiate use later (Merline, O'Malley, Schulenberg, Bachman, & Johnston, 2004). Therefore many studies have concluded that high school substance use is a predictor of use in middle adulthood. A. Barrett and R. Turner conducted a study collecting data from 1998 to 2000 with face to face interviews with a representative sample from South Florida of respondents aged 18 to 23 years old looking at the prevalence and social distributions of substance use disorders. Four family types were examined in their study: mother-father families, single parent families, single-parent family that includes other adult relatives, and stepfamilies. A. Barrett and R. Turner found family structure plays a part in adolescent substance abuse which ultimately is a risk factor for adult substance abuse. This study also concluded that single-parent families report a significantly higher level of problematic substance use. It was also found that socioeconomic status and family structure is related to risk factors in adolescence substance abuse. A. Barrett and R. Turner report that family members are central in shaping behavior which is known as the social learning theory were individuals acquire behavior by modeling and imitating others. Therefore one of the risk factors for adolescent drug use is parental substance abuse. If there is an older sibling who participates in substance abuse the likelihood of the adolescent use increases ( Barrett & Turner, 2006). The quality of the parental or sibling relationship also plays part in adolescent substance abuse. Families with many negative conflicts and poor emotional and social support is considered to be another risk factor for leading to adolescent substance abuse. Greater emotional detachment from parental figures can lead to increasing level of peer pressure felt by the adolescent. As it has been identified family has many influential aspects that can be considered an adolescent risk factor for substance abuse.

In the context of emerging adulthood J. Arnett defines emerging adulthood as 18-25 years old and argues that this is a new stage of development that has recently come about. With the increasing pressure on further education and economic instability the emerging adults have began to experience living at home for longer periods, staying in school longer as well as delaying marriage and children until their late twenties. Emerging adulthood is the age range for the highest use of illicit drugs with alcohol being the most commonly misused (Arnett, 2005). In J. Arnett’s study of emerging adulthood, he discusses the rise of this new developmental stage and how these early adults deal with societal, identity and other problems they may face during this stage. Because of societies “rules and regulations” individuals feel they must follow during this stage of their life such as marriage, children, and a stable job, these individuals tend to fall to substance abuse through deviant friendships or even friendships through work, school and common interest.

Arkes and Iguchi look at predictors of prescription drug abuse across all age groups using the 2001 to 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health to look at five age groups who have used nonmedical prescription drugs in the past year. Although alcohol abuse is prevalent among the emerging adolescents, narcotics such as prescription drug use of Vicodin, Ritalin and Oxycontin abuse is on the rise in all age groups (Arkes & Iguchi 2008). Adolescents in high school who are and have experienced with these prescription drugs do not even realize that these drugs are considered illicit drugs. High school students who feel they are peer pressured or simply want to fit in with certain groups through the use of prescription pills or other illegal substance serves as a risk factor in adolescent’s substance abuse leading into adulthood. In college age student’s stimulants are more likely to be used to help them stay awake for long hours of studying or working on homework. Adults may use prescription painkillers nonmedically because they became addicted after legitimate use of the drug (Arkes & Iguchi 2008).

**Hypothesis**

There have been many studies that have concluded risk factors for substance abuse in adulthood. I am proposing to test three hypothesis of factors that lead to the use of illegal substances during middle adulthood. Hypothesis one states family structure as adolescents affects ones risk of using drugs during middle adulthood, such as adolescents from single-parent homes are more likely to use than adolescents form mother-father homes. My dependent variable is the risk of using drugs and my independent variable is family structure. Hypothesis two states education affects ones risk of using drugs. College graduates who have received a four year degree are less likely to use illicit drugs in middle adulthood. My dependent variable again is the risk of using drugs and my independent variable is education. Hypothesis three states marital status is a risk factor for middle age substance abuse, such as divorced or widowed adults are more likely to use drugs than those adults who are married. My dependent variable is the risk or drug use and my independent variable is marital status.

**Data & Method**

I would like to test my hypothesis by performing a cross-sectional study questionnaire using a statistical analysis that would be self-administered to individuals 18-49 years old. The survey will be a booklet given to the Charlotte and surrounding area individuals based on age and race. In order to get a representative sample that completes the booklet and mails it back in, it would be ensured that the booklet would be given to more than the representative sample needed for data collection to make sure enough data was collected. If there is only a small percentage of respondents to mail the booklet back in, the data method will be repeated to ensure enough data is collected. I would like to survey three age groups 18-25, 26-34 and 35-49. I would like to have an equal representation of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic and other race participants within each age group to look at race related factors in middle age and adolescent substance abuse. The questionnaire will include marital status, educational background, employment, gender, race/ethnicity, income, health, and various questions from adolescent years such as family structure, family socioeconomic status and parental drug use. Included in the study will be a set of questions that is indicative of past or present drug use and the participant will be asked to indicate which drug or drugs was used in the past, which will then be composed into composite statistical analysis for each drug and age of use. These questions will include health problems due to drug use, missed school or work due to drugs, or unable to resist the urge to use or having withdrawal symptoms related to drug use. Questions that refer to the participant’s adolescent years are important in determining other factors that may have lead to substance abuse in middle adulthood. Predictors such as family structure will be measure by who the participant lived with between the ages of 13-18, mother-father families, single parent families, single-parent family that includes other adult relatives, and stepfamilies. Family socioeconomic status as an adolescent and adult will both be measured by asking the participant to put the average income during the adolescent years and adult years in the appropriate boxes. Answers will then be coded to fall into categories such as high, middle high, middle low and low socioeconomic status. Parental education attainment level will be considered and used as a composite score along with parental occupational type. Parental drug use will be measured by asking participants a series of yes and no questions pertaining to their parents such as during adolescence did your parental figures use cocaine? Excessive alcohol? Prescription pills? I would also like to use various questions from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health and recode the answers to fit within my measurements.

This method is appropriate for this study because it would draw questions from other studies related to substance abuse and questions from the nationally recognized survey The National Survey of Drug Use and Health. Each question that is used from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health will be recoded to fit this study. Drawing questions from previous studies as well as the national survey will provide a greater opportunity for variance in the results. Results will be looked at within three age groups 18-25, 26-34 and 35-49. Using this method of breaking the age groups down will provide risk factor results for each age group which ultimately leads to middle adulthood prevalence of substance abuse and risk factors. Using a set of questions that are indicative of drugs use or dependence is a strong measurement for this study because these variables are important in determining the risk factors associated with the use of illegal substance particularly in middle adulthood.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Risk factors for middle age adult substance abuse vary from adolescent risk factors to emerging adulthood risk factors to factors in adulthood. Alcohol and substance abuse disorders are the strongest predictors of morbidity and mortality (Merline, Jager, & Schulenberg, 2008). To facilitate efforts to diminish their negative influence on individuals, families and communities we need to have a better understanding of their developmental antecedents. This study will be able to show that many predictors and risk factors associated with adolescent alcohol and drug use retain their predictive value across emerging adulthood throughout middle adulthood. This research study also shows that middle age adult substance use is still prevalent among their adulthood roles and experiences.

**References**

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