Resiliency, Emotional Intelligence, and Social Support: Protective Factors Associated with Positive Trajectories in Youth

Lauren Serge

Graduate Student, Department of Social Work
Mentor: Dr. Gordon Capp

Significance of Study: Adolescence is a vulnerable period during which individuals are at risk for developing unsafe and unhealthy behaviors, including substance use. Recent expansions in the positive youth development movement indicate that there are ways to create more positive trajectories for youth with the presence of protective factors. Schools are one of the many social systems that youth are embedded in that can capture the critical protective factors that promote positive outcomes in youth.

Research Purpose: Using the positive youth development framework, the current study aims to support this theoretical framework by examine the relationship between protective factors including resiliency, emotional intelligence, and social support and substance use among youth.

Methods: Secondary data from the biennial 2017-2019 California Healthy Kids Survey was used for this analysis. The sample (n = 45,848) included anonymous, self-reported student responses in grades 7, 9, and 11. The study was cross-sectional and used quantitative data from randomly selected schools.

Results: Logistic regression was utilized to explore the relationships between resiliency, emotional intelligence, social support, and substance use. Findings indicated that social support at home and social support at school were significantly and negatively associated with substance use, suggesting that adolescents with social support at home and at school were less likely to use substances.

Conclusion: Findings from this study align with the positive youth development model where increased social support may be a protective factor for substance use. These findings also emphasize the importance of creating supportive and empowering environments for youth to build on their resiliency and become competent individuals. Social workers have a critical role in supporting this development by incorporating a strength-based approach in their practice. Social workers must advocate and implement policies that uplift youth through relationship engagement and a positive school climate.