

ABSTRACT

Adolescents are more likely to engage in alcohol use, despite additional risk factors that may be present. Social support in terms of depth and diversity may act as a mitigating factor to prevent adolescents from engaging in alcohol use. In particular, adolescent offenders are at higher risk for engaging in alcohol use, and ultimately cycling through the juvenile justice system repeatedly, due to crimes that were committed at a young age. The objective of the study is to explore the effects of social support on alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders. The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the Pathways to Desistance Study which was carried out from 2000 to 2010 in Maricopa County, Arizona, and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. Participants completed surveys, and interviews that were conducted through computer assisted programs. The current study's sample size was 1,354 (1,170 males and 184 females). All youth had been found guilty of committing a crime. The results of the study suggest that negative peer influence was correlated with increased alcohol use among juvenile offenders. Surprisingly, the results also suggested that diverse social support was also correlated with alcohol use among juvenile offenders.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- Within the United States, the 12-month prevalence of alcohol use disorder is estimated to be 4.6% among twelve to seventeen-year-olds and 8.5% among adults age eighteen years and older

Purpose of Research

- The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between a caring adult figure and alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the presence of a caring adult figure and alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders?
2. What is the relationship between the depth of social support and alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

Hypotheses

- Juvenile offenders who report the presence of a caring adult, will report less alcohol consumption.
- Juvenile offenders who report a diverse, deep social support, will report less alcohol consumption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Caring Adult Figure and Alcohol Use

- Reimuller, Shadur, and Hussong (2011) suggest adolescents require positive forms of family social support, particularly from parents, to reduce the risk of engaging in alcohol abuse.
- Park, Kim, and Kim (2009) suggest adolescents with higher (meaning more) parental support tended to engage in fewer negative anti-social behaviors such as alcohol abuse or self-medication.

Buffering Hypothesis

- The stress-buffering hypothesis is best defined as the presence of social support is believed to eliminate or lessen the negative relationship between perceived stress as a result of a chronic condition on physical health, mental health, and quality of life (Gellert et al., 2018).

Gaps and Limitations

- Lack in the literature exists concerning protective factors among juvenile offenders from engaging in alcohol abuse
- Lack in the literature exists concerning social support among juvenile offenders.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the Pathways to Desistance Study which was carried out from 2000 to 2010 in Maricopa County, Arizona, and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania
- Data was collected through computer-assisted interviews with the interviewer and the participant sitting next to each other, both being able to see the information on the computer screen.
- Data was collected via multiple measurement points, one baseline measure (between the years of 2000 and 2003) and then again at 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 48, 60, 72, and 84 months after their first interview.

Sample and Sampling Method

- Participants consisted of youth aged 14 to 19 who were enlisted via juvenile and adult facilities.
- Participants consisted of male and female participants.
- The sample included 1,170 males and 184 females.
- Participants were found guilty of committing a serious crime.
- The sample size of the current study is (n=1354) juvenile offenders, who eventually transitioned into adulthood.

Measures

- The first independent variable was peer influence. There were one question utilized to examine peer influence.
- The second independent variable was the presence of a caring adult figure. There were eleven questions examining the presence of a caring adult figure. In particular, the diversity and the depth of social support was utilized in the current study.
- The dependent variable was alcohol use. Five questions were administered evaluating the amount and frequency of alcohol consumption by juvenile offenders.

RESULTS

Spearman Rho Correlation Analysis

- A Spearman's Rho Correlation Analysis was calculated to examine relationship between domains with either family or non family support and alcohol abuse. No statistically significant correlation was found. Domains with either family or non-family support was not associated with alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

- The relationship between depth of social support and alcohol abuse was examined. No statistically significant correlation was found ($r_s = .053$, $p = .054$).

- The relationship between diversity of social support and alcohol abuse was examined. The results indicated a positive and statistically significant association between diversity of social support and alcohol abuse, $r_s = .077$, $p < .001$. The strength of the correlation was weak. Diversity of social support was related to higher levels of alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

- The relationship between negative peer influence and alcohol abuse was examined. The results indicated a statistically significant association between peer influence and alcohol abuse, $r_s = .149$, $p < .001$. The strength of the correlation was weak. Increased influence of peer was related to increase alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

- All previously mentioned relationships are displayed in Table 3. The correlation can be seen in the scatterplot in Figure 1.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics (N=1,345)

Characteristic	f	%
Gender		
Male	1170	86.4
Female	184	13.6
Age	M=16.04	SD=1.14
Ethnicity		
White	274	20.2
Black	561	41.4
Hispanic	454	33.5
Other	65	4.8
Family Structure		
Two biological parents	199	14.7
Single biological mom	559	41.3
Single biological dad	74	5.5
Biological mom and stepdad	238	17.6
Biological dad and stepmom	42	3.1
Other adult relative	164	12.1
Two adoptive parents	10	0.7
No adult in the home	64	4.7
Other	4	0.3
Age First Time Ran Away		
9 or younger	28	2.1
10	15	1.1
11	24	1.8
12	64	4.7
13	84	6.2
14	98	7.2
15	81	6.0
16	50	3.7
17	13	1.0
Never Ran Away	897	66.2
Highest Grade Completed Before GED		
6 th grade or less	26	1.9
7 th grade	88	6.5
8 th grade	402	29.7
9 th grade	342	25.3
10 th grade	323	23.9
11 th grade	149	11.0
High school graduate	24	1.8

Note. Single biological mom category includes never married, divorced or separated, widowed, married but biological dad not present, and marital status unknown.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics: Study Variables

Variables	M	SD
Domains with family or non-family support	6.64	1.75
Depth of social support	2.00	1.06
Diversity of social support	4.02	1.95
Negative peer influence (proportion of 4 closest friends ever arrested)	0.45	0.38
Alcohol use	3.76	6.13

Table 3
Correlations of Social Support and Alcohol Abuse

Independent and Dependent Variables	r _s	df	p
Domains with family or non-family support and alcohol abuse	.017	1346	.525
Depth of social support and alcohol abuse	.053	1346	.054
Diversity of social support and alcohol abuse	.077	1346	.004
Negative Peer Influence and alcohol abuse	.149	1295	<.001

Figure 1
Correlations of Negative Peer Influence and Alcohol Abuse



DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The results of inferential analyses yielded significant and insignificant findings in effect of social support and alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders. The results showed that negative peer influence was correlated with increased alcohol use which is consistent with previous findings. Additionally, diversity of social support was correlated with increased alcohol use which is not consistent with the previous findings conducted by Park et al., (2009). Additionally, the results showed that the depth of social support did not impact alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders.

Implications for Research and Practice

- The current findings suggest future research to address the unique and specific needs of adolescents on the correctional facility setting
- Future research of this population can illuminate the particular needs of adolescent juvenile offenders, and educate others on the importance of social support
- The current findings can be utilized to educate employees within juvenile justice systems how impactful negative peer influence can have on alcohol use
- Additionally, the current findings can illustrate how social support is not restricted to familial relations to have an impact on alcohol abuse among juvenile offenders

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths:

- The current study is that the participants and data were gathered from multiple counties ranging from Maricopa county, Philadelphia county, and others.
- The study maintained participants over a ten-year span which allowed for proper follow up.

Limitations:

- The current study consisted of more males than females which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the female population in the juvenile justice system
- The definition of diversity of social support varies widely in other areas of research
- The research was mostly gathered through computer assisted programs which sometimes lasted more than a few hours

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Lee for her support, and guidance in completing this project. I would like to also thank Dr. Lee for always being available and remaining helpful throughout the year to complete this project. I would also like to thank the whole Social Work Department for their support while in the program in addition to their flexibility and assistance during this pandemic.