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Victoria Vinciguerra

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Victoria Vinciguerra
Sociological Analysis
Literature Review

Family, Peers and School Programs and the Influence on Juvenile Marijuana Use

Overview

Drug use has is a common form of deviance among adolescents. This paper focuses on the different ways that social institutions try to positively or negatively influence juveniles from becoming involved in drug use. I will provide evidence on school programs and give conclusions on the helpfulness of them. I will also write about the parent-child relationship and whether or not this is a main influence of substance abuse. Finally, the peer group will be analyzed to determine how much of an effect they might have. These three factors will be explored throughout the content of this literature review. By showing the effects of how family, peers and school programs influence drug and alcohol use, one will have a better understanding of why adolescents might or might not turn to these illegal activities.

For the purpose of this paper, the main drug I will be focusing on will be marijuana. My research question asks what the different ways that family, peers and school programs influence drug use such as marijuana among adolescents. Through research of scholarly journal articles, I hypothesize that I will find both negative and positive effects that all three groups will have on drug use by a young person.

Background

Juvenile delinquency could be considered a sociological problem. According to social learning theorists, a child learns behaviors from the people around them (Bahr,

Maughan, Marcos, and Li 1998 as cited by Dorius, Bahr, Hoffmann and Harmon 2004). From the beginning, parents or guardians are the ones that a child spends most of their time with. While young, a parent can be the biggest influence in a child's life. This relates to the social institution of the family, the main institution until the child is old enough to go to the school. Once there, the school acts as another major social institution along with the teachers and peers who are now in the child's life. These two groups are where a child will learn the most about themselves and what activities they partake in.

The question of why adolescents decide to become involved with marijuana cannot be answered simply. From my research, I have discovered that over half of all high school seniors have at least tried marijuana once in their lives (Cavanagh 2008). Social learning theorists would conclude that the reason a child might use drugs is because they are modeling the people in their lives. If the parents are drinking heavily every night and leaving evidence of drug use, a child might think that these things are okay. Also, if their peers and groups of kids that are considered 'popular' are involved in illegal activities, children might think it will boost their social status and become involved, as well. These theories are not necessarily truths, however. They are just hypotheses about why different outcomes happen.

Throughout my studies of marijuana abuse, the oldest participant in any data conclusion is 20 years old. However, my main focus will be on juveniles, which is considered by myself for the purpose of this paper any minor age 17 or younger. The only study where the participant is older than that is in the journal article by Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman and Johnston (2003). They conducted a longitudinal study involving juveniles from age 14 until they reach the age of 20. However, although

the participants in the article are older than 17, the findings are still relevant and play an important role in my paper.

Family Influence

From the moment we are born, the majority of people have one or two parents who are their main form of support. They are taught how to walk, talk, and do everything a normal human being would do. They also have a tremendous influence on the decisions that one makes as they get older. Shannon E. Cavanagh (2008) writes about the family structure and how, even though a good amount children in the United States actually do live in two parent households, over 50% have either lived in single parent families or with step-parents for some portion of their lives. She explains that family background can be an important indicator of substance abuse in the future among adolescents. The purpose of her research was to map out children's family structure histories across their early life courses (Cavanagh 2008:945) for the reason to investigate further in child development.

Divorce is a large indicator of later deviance for adolescents. According to Cavanagh's (2008) research, the traumatic event takes a big toll on the child's life, usually taking full effect within two years. In many cases, however, the result of divorce is noticed several years later (Cavanagh 2008). In her research, Cavanagh (2008) took data from a study called Add Health, which is a study of 7-12 graders (approximately 90,000) and then took a sample from those students to participate in a second wave of the survey to get longitudinal information. One of the main points of her results showed that the students shown to be in two parent families (either biological or adoptive) were significantly less distressed than ones whose parents have gone through divorce and are

now in single parent families or are living with step-parents, as well. According to the second model of her data, results showed that a child of a single parent family has a 48% higher chance of using marijuana than one of two parents. These results show that one of the biggest deterrents of drugs is having a family institution with, ideally, two parents living in the same household (Cavanagh 2008).

When a child's relationships from their parents is distant, the chances of abnormal behavior are much more likely. In the article by Cassandra J. Dorius, Stephen J. Bahr, John P. Hoffmann and Elizabeth L. Harmon (2004), they write about the relationship of the mother and the father in reference to drug use among their children. Their methodology was using 4,484 students for a paper and pencil survey from both public and private schools with about 51% of the sample being females. The survey yielded the main result is that the closeness of the father to the child plays a significant role. If the child has a close relationship with their father, their chances of using marijuana are much less than if their father is distant or there is no father present. The specific relationship of the mother showed no significant results in this particular survey. Another important detail was the perception of the chances of getting caught. If the parent is more involved in the child's life, the likelihood of disapproval and getting caught were much higher. Therefore, when the chances of getting caught were higher, the results showed that the use of marijuana was significantly lower (Dorius et al. 2004).

Traumatic events can also lead to higher drug use among teens. When a big change comes into an adolescent's life, it creates a sort of chaos about how they think. For example, Krohn, Hall, and Lizotte (2008) talk about transitions and the effects on the lives of young people. Their definition of transition is any change in family makeup,

including a parent leaving, the loss of a family member, and any major family turmoil (Krohn Hall and Lizotte 2008:466) that take a serious emotional toll on the child.

According to their research, the more transitions a boy has before the ages of 14, the more likely he will turn to deviant behavior and drug use by the time he is 17 ½.

Although the researchers explain that they did not differentiate between the different transitions, they explain that these were the overall results. They did study a small percentage of girls, but their hypothesis did not prove to be significant in their research results. This proves that a parent is an essential part of a child's life, and without one or both parents, the juvenile becomes more prone and vulnerable to marijuana use and other illegal activities (Krohn Hall and Lizotte 2008).

Peer Influence

Once a child begins to grow up, it is their friends who prove to be some of the most influential people in their young lives. Even a group of people who are not the child's friends might still have a huge impact on decisions that are made. According to Jennifer Butters (2004), although many people grow out of the phase of using marijuana, this is not the case for everyone. She explores children in Ontario, Canada who have been recorded to be already using cannabis for recreational purposes. She explained how the rate of students indicated using cannabis 40 or more times in the past 12 months increased from 13.6% in 1993 to 20.9% in 2001 (Butters 2004:382) in the Ontario area. This issue suggests that 1 in 5 students were using marijuana consistently for at least one year. Her method used was surveying children in grades 7, 9, 11, and 13 in Ontario, Canada. Of the 3,990 students eligible to take the survey, only 576 were considered marijuana users. The only information that Butters collected came from the 576 surveys.

The survey was anonymous, and was taken with pencil and paper (Butters 2004). Her main findings included the fact that if one's peers disapproved of marijuana use, then this would most likely deter the child from also engaging in these activities. This agrees with the social learning theory and how people often mimic other people's behaviors. Butters (2004) also did a detailed analysis on both males and females and found that they both are seriously affected by what their associates in school do. The disapproval of marijuana among peers for females reduced their usage by 60%. For males, marijuana disapproval reduced their practices by 38% (Butters 2004). This shows that females rely on their friends and associates around them more for their habits. If no one in their peer group uses marijuana, it is a lot less likely that this female will rebel and start using. It also shows that these results are less likely for males (Butters 2004).

When looking at the aspects of peers and marijuana influence, a (longitudinal) longitudinal study is a good way to look at children throughout a period of time to see if their attitudes and feelings change. Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman and Johnston (2003) gathered information from 1,897 students beginning at age 14 until they were 20 years old. Focusing on the marijuana portion of the survey, the results yielded that as the students got older, marijuana use became more prevalent in their young lives. These are common results, but what were some of the reasons why the number increased. It was shown through their data that students who had high results in the loneliness category as well as low results in the misbehavior category had more profuse marijuana use. The article also mentions that the children who had more friends who did not approve of drug use in 8th grade had a higher success rate of little or no marijuana use when they were 20 years old (Bryant et al. 2003). This data shows informative results

that agree with the hypothesis that children with drug using associates are more likely to engage in the same activities.

School Programs

Many attempts have been made by the schools itself to try and reduce the drug use. Teachers have teamed up with police, other teachers, and parents to provide drug abstinence programs and teach kids the harmful effects of what marijuana can do to someone. Many parents approve of these kinds of programs because they believe that anything to try and help their children stay away from illegal activities is a good thing. However, are these programs really helping the kids? Are these programs making a significant impact or are they just wasting the taxpayers' money? Not all users are the same, and some kids might respond differently to different programs (Kulis, Nieri, Yabiku, Stromwall, Marsiglia 2007). The purpose of this section is to determine the overall effectiveness of two different drug abstinence programs.

The D.A.R.E. program is considered the original drug abstinence program. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) was created in Los Angeles in the early 1980s by the Los Angeles Police Department and the teachers in the school district. Their focus was on 5th and 6th graders, which they considered a prime group to participate in drug education. The program is now spread to approximately 20 countries around the world (Dukes, Ullman, Stein 1996). It is a very expensive program; ?costs per uniformed police officer approach \$50,000 per year, and costs per student begin at approximately \$100? (Dukes, Ullman and Stein 1996:64). The question is: does this program actually work?

In the Dukes, Ullman and Stein study, they surveyed 497 9th grade students who

received in the program, and 352 who have not and compared both the results to see if there were significant differences. In their overall conclusion, they reported no real significant differences between the two groups. Both groups answered similarly on their surveys, showing high resistance of peer pressure and self esteem. Also, both admitted to being somewhat experimental groups, meaning that the majority had at least tried marijuana once or use it occasionally. It did not show that the program was successful in anyway. My criticisms for the program include the age that of the children for which the program was conducted. It seems like 5th and 6th graders, for the most part, do not think of drugs as an issue. 11 years old is a very early age, and even though this is not the case in more urban areas like Los Angeles, the overall usage is low (Dukes, Ullman and Stein 1996).

Birkeland, Murphy-Graham and Weiss (2005) did an evaluation of the D.A.R.E. program in communities in Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts and Colorado. The goal was to see why school districts decided to keep the D.A.R.E. program even though there have been many studies showing inadequate results. They collected qualitative data by conducting interviews with 128 people throughout the span of three years in sixteen different towns. Hoping to find some justification for the program, they encountered interesting results showing reasons why D.A.R.E. should be obsolete. The biggest problem that I saw was that interviewees showed no real passion for the program or any program for that matter. It was said that it is impossible for any society to keep drugs away and that D.A.R.E. had goals that were out of reach.

A Massachusetts school official expressed his opinion the best by stating, I think the problem really is the societal emphasis on drugs, and so, I don't think any program is

going to sustain 100% or even 80% success, when you're dealing with a culture that just doesn't take it seriously (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham Weiss 2005:251). Although this article expressed bias leaning towards no school programs working at all, there have been other attempts to create programs with better results than D.A.R.E.

In recent years, a new program is being tested that relates significantly to the D.A.R.E. program. It is called "Keepin' It REAL". It was a program started by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It is a more focused program, aiming towards culturally diverse juveniles. The purpose of the program is "preventing substance use, strengthening anti-drug norms and attitudes, and increasing the use of drug resistance strategies" (Kulis et al. 2007:37). The program goal is to teach these kids about drugs and hope that they will make better decisions when they are placed in a pressure situation where marijuana and other illegal activities are present. Kulis data looked at two groups of students in a state that was not identified. It was in a place where drug and alcohol use was the norm amongst their age group. Approximately 77% of the students participating had received the program within the last 12 months. They compared both groups to see what they would find. Their results showed a significantly higher reduction rate than the D.A.R.E. program did in the previous article. Of their sample who had received the course, 617 reported to be avid marijuana users. The program's information significantly showed results, with "31% reducing marijuana use and 25% recently discontinuing use" (Kulis et al. 2007:42).

Why did this program work so much better than the D.A.R.E. program? Mary L. Harthun, Patricia A. Dustman, Leslie Jumper Reeves, Michael L. Hecht, and Flavio F. Marsiglia (2008) explain that the "Keepin' it REAL" program focuses more on cultural

norms and values. It was not just some distant police officer saying that drugs are bad. It related more to the group of kids that were actually participating. The teachers of the program were trained in their own culture as well as the cultures that the majority of the students were a part of. They try to create skills that would make resisting peer pressure easier (Harthun et al. 2008).

Conclusion

It has been seen that marijuana use is a common thing that takes place among adolescents. Parents have been shown to have a good influence on their kids, as well as a bad influence in some situations. Depending on what the parent's actions are, it has been viewed to show influences either way. For example, a parent who is in the child's life, and knows and disapproves of cannabis, has a better chance of deterring a child who does not have that parent in their life. A child has a better chance of being able to resist the pressure of doing drugs if they have a strong two parent family who is there to support and punish them (Cavanagh 2008). However, it is difficult to explain why some children still rebel from what their parents want.

A lot of the pressure has been shown to be the influence of the people who the child associates him or herself with. A peer group or clique that approves of smoking marijuana and who is looked up to by others can be a great manipulator of their friends and associates. Though some parents might condone the use of marijuana, most if not all parents do not want this recreation to turn into something worse.

Even though many situations exist where students decide to participate in the use of marijuana, there are still ways to prevent it. We learned that D.A.R.E. is not necessarily the best way to go about helping our children, but what about "Keepin' it

REAL”? Even though it is directed towards to ethnic and minority groups, it would be in the best interest to try and expand to all schools in America. The only thing that needs to be modified is aiming at the specific cultural norms for that particular area, as well as using multiple cultural norms in diverse places. It is also important to get information home to the parents of how to talk to your kids about drugs and alcohol. And if all else fails and children still want to rebel from their school and elders, parents must keep track of who the child is associating with. Parents should have their children’s friends over to dinner, meet their friends? parents and just have normal checkup talks with them and see how they are doing. Research has been shown that if a child has one or both parents who take an interest in their school work, the chances of marijuana use is significantly lower (Bryant et al. 2003).

Throughout my research, I would have liked to see more studies done on certain topics that were not addressed. For one, I would like to see more information on the time of day it is most common for an adolescent to be engaging in marijuana use. According to David Finkelhor (1997), a respected UNH sociology professor, the most common time for children to get victimized or become victims of a crime is between the hours of 3 and 4pm. This could be a main issue if drug use was researched to be used consistently at that time of day. I would also like to see more studies done on juniors and seniors over middle school children, especially when looking at school programs. I believe it would be more useful because of the fact that age group is closer to adulthood and could give more information on the studies of consistent adult usage.

Overall, drug use is inevitable. It can be considered the cool thing to do, or the rebellious thing to do. Either way, taking all the steps necessary to try and improve our

child's lives is essential to parenting, teaching, and being a reasonably prudent person.

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