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Factors Leading to Adolescent Drug Abuse in Winooski

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INTRODUCTION

According to SAMSHA, Vermont ranks high in the area of substance use in comparison to other states. In Winooski, Vermont, 30% of adolescents have used marijuana and 14% have used prescription drugs not prescribed for them. Of those adolescents who use marijuana, 5% started before the age of 13 with the remainder starting sometime during the ages of 13-18 (Chen).

Studies have shown that some common risk factors for drug use in adolescents include: instability in the home, mental illness, high crime rates, and easy accessibility to drugs (Ali). The goal of this study was to identify the underlying risk factors that are important for initiating drug use in adolescents ages 13-18 in Winooski, Vermont. Identifying these risk factors could help guide the development of drug prevention programs.

DEFINITION OF DRUGS

Prescription drugs and illegal substances including marijuana. Alcohol and tobacco were not considered drugs in this study.

METHODS

Three focus groups were created with members of the social/education community, healthcare community, and recovering addicts. Each focus group discussed 14 questions that fell into three categories as defined in the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura). Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and comments were delinked from the participants. Demographics of participants were recorded (Table 1, Figure 1).

From these transcripts, factors leading to drug abuse were assessed and sorted into environmental, individual, and behavioral factors. Proposed recommendations for prevention were then gleaned from the aggregated findings.

RESULTS

MAJOR RISK FACTORS

ENVIRONMENT

Location (Fig. 2)
Easy access to drugs
Low socioeconomic status
Lack of extracurricular activities
Social network
Trends in drug use

INDIVIDUAL

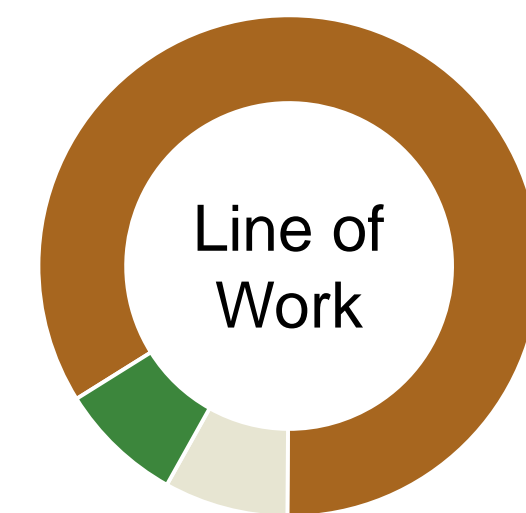
Independent of academic success
No stereotypical profile of drug user
Mental health issues
Gender (F > M)

BEHAVIOR

Coping skills
Other substance use/abuse
Intent of drug use

Level of Education	%
High School/GED	14%
Some College	14%
2 Years College	0%
4 Years College	28%
Master's Degree	44%
Gender	%
Male	42%
Female	58%

Table 1:
Demographics of
Focus Groups



Social/Education
Justice
Healthcare

Figure 1:
Demographics of
Focus Groups

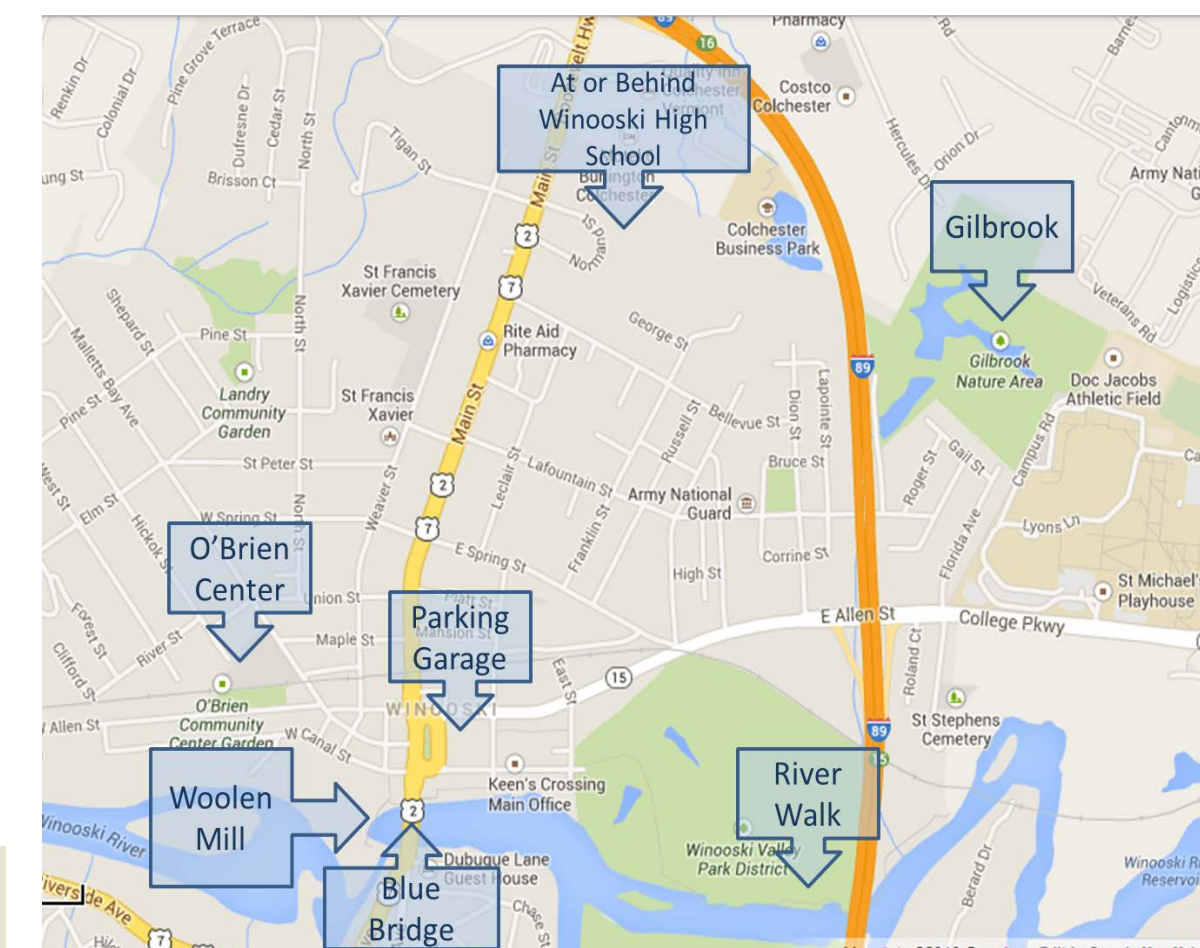


Figure 2: Major locations of drug activity

DISCUSSION

Focus groups held with community stakeholders revealed major factors for drug initiation in adolescents. The following factors should be considered when planning future interventions: frequented public areas, theft, poor access to extracurricular activities and transportation, and development of appropriate coping skills. Previous community coalition work in other parts of Vermont has been successful in reducing drug use (Flewelling). Efforts have most likely been successful because of the focus placed on promoting and disseminating information about community resources to adolescents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings reinforce previous research which has identified the importance of strong role models and availability and access to after school programs in preventing drug initiation (Nation). We recommend that current and future efforts consider these factors when developing strategies to prevent and decrease drug use in adolescents living in Winooski, VT.

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