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Population Health

title	Family, Peer and School Relationships as Predictors of Tobacco, Alcohol and Cannabis Use in Irish Adolescents: Differences between Sustained and Experimental Substance Use Behaviour
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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a vital period in shaping behaviour patterns. Substance use is one of the most commonly studied risk behaviours among adolescents. There are three mutually exclusive levels of substance use: non-use, experimentation and current use. Understanding the social context of the experience of substance use is at the core of comprehending substance use among adolescents. Parental, peer and school influences have all been previously shown to be associated with adolescent substance use.

OBJECTIVE

This study investigates the role of relationships with parents, friends, within the school and school connectedness in predicting use of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis.

METHODOLOGY

The current study investigates the determinants of the levels of substance use examining 2 parental variables, 5 peer variables, and 3 school variables. This study is based on data collected from the 2006 Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study (www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc). Participants for this study included 3346 students aged 15-17 years old from across the Republic of Ireland. There were 2089 males and 1842 females.

RESULTS

Sustained substance use rates were 29% for smoking, 47% for alcohol, and 11% for cannabis, with rates of experimentation at 24%, 28% and 9% respectively. Determinants for each of the nine models were established, and all analyses were controlled for gender and parental social class. The predictive power of relationships with parents, friends and the school variables were similar across substances.

Relationships with parents were positively associated with non-substance use, and negatively with sustained use ($p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.001$). Relationships with teachers and school connectedness were also positively associated with non-substance use, and negatively with sustained use ($p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.001$).

The patterns for relationships with friends were more complex; for all substances, the relationship with opposite sex friends was most important, compared to same sex or best friend. Relationships with opposite sex friends was negatively associated with non-substance use, and positively with sustained use ($p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.001$).

Few of the tested variables were predictive of experimental use of any substance. None of the three models of experimentation were a good fit based on the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit statistics.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings demonstrate the etiological similarity of psychoactive substances, and have interesting implications for contextual models, particularly in relation to experimental substance use, and indeed for the conceptualisation of substance use itself. The data confirm within Ireland the extensive research on the importance of inter-personal relationships for health behaviour, which has been conducted on adolescent substance use in other countries. However, it also highlights the need for further investigation into the determinants of substance use. Particular attention should be given to both the parental and school variables that are important for both non-use and current use.

PRESENTED

As a Paper at the *“Psychology, Health and Medicine, Annual Conference of the Division of Health Psychology, PSI & BPS”*, in Derry, Northern Ireland during March 2008, by Aoife Gavin, Michael Molcho, Colette Kelly and Saoirse Nic Gabhainn.

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