Fall 12-11-2020

Adolescent Substance Use Identification and Early Interventions: A Guide for School Counseling Professionals

Olivia Gullickson
gullicks.oliv@gmail.com

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Adolescent Substance Use Identification and Early Interventions:

A Guide for School Counseling Professionals

Olivia C. Gullickson

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Fall 2020

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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Adolescent Substance Use Identification and Early Interventions: A Guide for School

Counseling Professionals

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Olivia C. Gullickson

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: Anquinetta V. Calhoun, Ph.D.

Anquinetta V. Calhoun

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Signature

Approval Date: 11 December 2020

Abstract

The purpose for this proposed literature review is to assess a variety of different substance use intervention programs and their effectiveness within a school setting. Based on current research provided by the Monitoring the Future Survey (2019), adolescent substance use continues to be on the rise and school-based substance use programs that are currently being utilized are ineffective to students exhibiting substance use and meeting their needs. This literature review also explores the use of parental monitoring interventions to support adolescent substance use in conjunction to school-based prevention programs. Findings from the proposed literature is intended to assist K-12 school counseling professionals on the implementation of school-based substance use programs and interventions that are proven effective to reduce adolescent substance use.

Keywords: Adolescent substance use, intervention, prevention, school counselor, evidence-based

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Adolescent Substance Use Identification and Early Interventions:

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Adolescent substance use continues to be on the rise currently in the United States with significant and notable increases in substances measured and documented that present as concerning. Data provided by the Monitoring the Future (2019) survey provides significant data into this notable and significant increase in adolescent substance use.

The problem to be addressed by this literature review is that previous research is insufficient into how school counseling professionals can advocate and aid in recovery for students engaging in substance use. According to Kumar et al. (2013), "despite the call for effective substance use prevention, many U.S. middle schools, and high schools do not provide evidence-based curricula… less than half of prevention programs offered delivered evidence-based instruction" (p. 2).

Understanding which types of evidence-based prevention and intervention techniques may benefit school counseling professionals best in working with this student population. As there has been a notable increase in substance use, it is of importance to assess school-based programs to see whether they are meeting the needs of students who are engaged in substance use. As students spend a significant amount of time within the school setting, it is important that all their needs are being met.

Significance of the Research

This literature review has the intention to create accurate and evidence-based intervention strategies for school counseling professionals within a school setting. In the current research that is available, there is a lack of evidence that mentions successful interventions for adolescent substance use in the schools. Adolescent substance use continues to be on the rise and it is of

importance for school counseling professionals to be aware of the signs and symptoms involving

adolescent substance use.

Review of Literature

Data on adolescent substance use is presented by the Monitoring the Future survey

(2019), which is a survey that is conducted annually and geared towards 8th, 10th, and 12th grade

students across the United States. This survey specifically assesses substance use among this

population and their attitudes/behaviors regarding substance use. The National Institute on Drug

Abuse (2019) yielded key findings from their 2019 Monitoring the Future Survey data on

selected substances used by 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). Here

we can see a small scope into the problem and significant increases with some substances used

by this specific population across the United States. We can clearly see a notable increase in

vaping, whether that be marijuana or nicotine in all three presented grade levels from 2018-2019.

Daily marijuana use has seen a significant increase specifically in the 8th and 10th grade

population and an increase in daily alcohol use in the 12th grade population. (The National

Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019).

The purpose of researching this topic is to educate and inform school counseling

professionals on the trends, prevalence, and dangers that adolescent substance use presents.

Adolescent substance use can present lifelong challenges as adolescents develop throughout the

lifespan. It is of importance to support adolescents who are at-risk or are currently using mood-

altering substances to allow for growth to take shape. This literature review presents the research

question of what types of evidence-based interventions are most effective in terms of ceasing

adolescent substance use within a school-based setting.

School-Based Substance Use Interventions Currently Practiced

As the data presented by the Monitoring the Future survey (2019) showcases a significant up-tick in substances used by adolescents, it is of importance to assess what is currently being done within school-settings to address this problem.

The U.S. Department of Education (2005) put into action the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 2002, which was put into place for school districts across the United States to adhere to the implementation of substance use prevention programs within the school setting. Currently within the United States there are more than 200 substance use prevention programs that are currently available, and we can see this number increasing as some school districts are found to create their own prevention programs (Kumar et al., 2013).

Kumar et al. (2013) states that, "The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education, has funded drug and violence prevention programs that are executed through state and local educational agencies, as well as public and private nonprofit organizations" (p. 2). Notable prevention programs such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program is just one example of a popular used drug prevention program utilized under this funding. However, "a number of states, schools' districts, and schools have developed their own drug prevention curricula" (Kumar et al., 2013, p. 2).

As there is clearly an abundance of substance use prevention programs readily available, this could also present as a problem when it comes to addressing the effectiveness of said programs. Kumar et al. (2013) reports that, "it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of any one program… Further complicating the issue, programs are often implemented in different grades and in different courses. The findings suggest that program implementation is idiosyncratic, depending on the school or school district, and the teacher(s) in charge of

delivering prevention education to students" (p. 9). This quote suggests that due to the nature of how school-based programs are implemented, it presents a challenge to assess for effectiveness and if said programs are actually meeting student needs.

Evidence-Based School-Based Interventions

The supporting research provides insight into current studies and school-based programs that have found success in decreasing adolescent substance use within a school-setting. Presented studies and research literature support students who are at-risk or currently engaging in adolescent substance use behaviors.

Demirezen et al. (2019) conducted a thorough study that assessed the effects of peer education programs to reduce adolescent substance abuse within a school setting. The purpose of this study is to fill a gap in the research as there is limited information on peer education programs conducted within a high school setting. Demirezen et al. (2019) reports that peer education programs are "based on educating volunteers and adolescent leaders on specific topics and the sharing of this acquired knowledge with their peers" (p. 377). This study selected 29 11th grade students as peer educators from three different high schools, who were selected based on results from an assessment and in-person interviews. These peer educators were then put through a training to teach skills on substance abuse prevention/education. Demirezen et al. (2019) reports that the peer education training was "prepared jointly by a child development expert, an abuse-counselor/psychiatric nurse and a senior psychiatric nurse in order to provide the peer educators (PEs) with basic knowledge about substance abuse to and to improve their presentation skills" (p. 378). Once this training was complete, peer educators then began working with 9th grade students within their school. Peer educators held educational sessions, hung posters in their

schools regarding substance abuse prevention and current problems, and peer educators also held small discussion groups for their student participants.

The findings from this study yielded positive results in terms of reducing adolescent substance abuse in the high school setting, especially in 9th grade students. Knowledge and attitude regarding substance use/abuse had shown an increase and the rates of trying mood-altering substances had decreased (Demirezen et al., 2019). "When 9th-grade students who were given the training and 10th grade students who did not get the training were compared after the PEP, the incidence of using all addictive substances among the 10th grade classes was significantly higher" (Demirezen et al., 2019, p. 383).

Froeschle et al. (2007) prompted a study assessing an eighth-grade school backed substance abuse prevention program. The SAM (solution, action, and mentorship) program was being evaluated in this study, "which was named for the basic program components: group solution focused brief therapy, action learning techniques, and mentorship" (Froeschle et al., 2007, p. 498). The purpose and focus of this study were to assess the changes of adolescent eighth-grade female's drug-using behavior. This study wanted to examine if this SAM program was effective in reducing drug-using behaviors among this specific population.

Froeschle et al. (2007) had a student participant total of 80 adolescent female students; 40 students were placed in a control group and 40 students were placed in the experimental group. All students for this study were selected and placed into the control and experimental groups at random. A total of six instruments were used during this study to assess overall progress of the participants in this study. The proposed instruments in this study were presented to participants of the study, teachers, and parents in a pre and posttest format.

Froeschle et al. (2007) reported on the SAM drug prevention program in that it "consisted of an integration of group solution-focused brief therapy techniques, action learning techniques, and community and peer mentorship" (p. 501). In addition to this, participants engaged in one-hour weekly group sessions for a total of 16 weeks. The school counselor had also arranged and organized two parent meetings for those student participants, one in the beginning of the program and one at the conclusion of the program. Results from this study suggest and support, "the use of group solution-focused brief therapy, peer and community mentorship, and interactive teaching methods by school counselors" (p. 503). By utilizing these components within this program, one is to see successful results and a decrease in drug use by students. We can make this conclusion as this study meets this population where they are at individually. "Data indicating an increase in drug use among control group members reveal the importance of implementing a drug prevention and intervention curriculum for all eighth-grade females that includes counseling as part of the program" (Froeschle et al., 2007, p. 503). This quote provides significant insight into the importance of implementing a drug prevention program for students and shows positive results yielded.

This specific drug prevention program also highlights how these school-based drug prevention programs align with the American School Counselor Association's National Model. "The ASCA National Model (2005) advocates the implementation of comprehensive guidance programs that target all students. The apparent correlations shown among knowledge levels, attitudes towards drug use, social behaviors, and drug use imply that these might be appropriate areas of focus when developing effective programs" (Froeschle et al., 2007, p. 503). This provides support to the importance of implementing a drug prevention program within all schools; to show equity and equality to all student populations.

Froeschle et al., (2007) concludes their findings from this study by stating, "The SAM program shows promise in preventing drug use, increasing socially competent behaviors that impact learning and knowledge of the consequences of drug use, while decreasing positive attitudes toward drug use" (p. 504).

Parental Monitoring Interventions

To promote effective substance use prevention programs within a school setting, it is of importance to get parents involved in their adolescents' progress to see wraparound support. "Parental monitoring is one of the most important protective factors contributing to childhood outcomes and has been linked to lower rates of substance use and better academic achievement" (Bergman et al., 2019, p. 1455).

Bergman et al. (2019) performed a two-year long randomized controlled trial to assess the impacts of relaying information to parents on their child's engagement within the school setting and by doing so, reduced rates in adolescent substance use can be found. The purpose and intent for this specific intervention was that "previous programs have largely focused on two strategies: (1) improving knowledge about the dangers of substance use and (2) helping adolescents cope with peer pressure" (Bergman et al., 2019, p. 1455). In understanding the intent of other previous substance use prevention programs, we can assume that these interventions are not meeting individual student needs or meeting the student where they are at.

Bergman et al. (2019) conducted a previous study that assessed information sharing with parents about their children and found that by doing this intervention, they saw an increase in successful test scores and grades. This previous study has now influenced the researchers to see if this intervention would, "reduce substance use among middle school adolescents in low-income, minority families" (Bergman et al., 2019, p. 1455).

This current study was conducted in the Los Angeles, California area and utilized a participant total of 318 seventh grade students and their parents/guardians. Participants for this study were selected from four public middle schools within the area and were placed within a control or intervention group. According to Berman et al. (2019), "three of the participating schools served more than 95% minority, low-income families, and the fourth school served approximately 40% minority, low-income families" (p. 1455).

The proposed intervention entitled, "Linking Information and Families Together (LIFT), consisted of weekly messages to parents detailing their child's missed assignments and behavior problems, which we obtained from the online gradebook" (Bergman et al., 2019, p. 1456). This study began for students in the seventh grade and was utilized as students moved through their eighth-grade year. This proposed study collected data from students and parents at the beginning and end of the school year to assess for student substance use and intentioned to use alcohol and marijuana (Bergman et al. 2019).

The results from this study found a significant decline in, "students' initiation and intentions to use alcohol and marijuana. Lifetime use of alcohol or marijuana was cut by 44% over an average 16-month follow-up period from the beginning of seventh through the end of eighth-grade" (Bergman et al., 2019, p. 1459).

Bergman et al. (2019) presents that the implementation of this specific intervention is cost-effective and is not difficult to implement. The results that this study found may suggest further research due to the effectiveness of the proposed intervention and due to the cost-effectiveness.

As the following proposed study allows the reader to get an understanding of the impact that parental monitoring can do in regards to reducing adolescent substance use, Pettigrew et al.

(2018) extends this research. Pettigrew et al. (2018) wanted to see the effects of a parent-adolescent substance use intervention strategy. To address the concerns of adolescent substance use, "prevention scholars argue that one of the most promising approaches is through parent-adolescent communication about substances (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and other drugs) and substance-use expectations" (Pettigrew et al., 2018, p. 349).

Pettigrew et al. (2018) evaluates a seventh grade school-based drug prevention program (Keepin' it Real), "the curriculum has no content that directly addresses parent-adolescent communication about substances, nor were parents directly involved in any of the curriculum" (Pettigrew et al., 2018, p. 351). Participants within this proposed study came from 39 schools in two Midwestern states within the United States. Several instruments were utilized within this study to assess how parents were having conversations about drug use with their children.

The intent of this study was to assess parent's differing 'drug-talk' styles and how parents are having conversations with their children about substance use. This proposed study assesses specific drug-talk styles while seeing if there is a relationship between these styles and engagement in adolescent substance use. "Parent-adolescent communication plays a particularly significant role in substance-use prevention. Parents are the individuals with whom children are most likely to talk about substances and youth consider parents to be credible sources of drug information" (Pettigrew et al., 2018, p. 349).

Findings from this study gives the reader a better understanding into communication styles that occur within the home about mood-altering substances and promotes drug prevention in adolescents (Pettigrew et al., 2018).

Applications to the School Counseling Profession

It is of importance for a school counseling professional to have a general awareness and understanding into the statistical data and current research regarding adolescent substance use. By creating a general awareness into this issue, one is more inclined to better assist and work with students who struggle with substance use and to provide evidence-based prevention and/or intervention methods within the school setting. Haskins (2012) presents that, "students at high risk for substance use and misuse come in contact with school counselors on a consistent basis and school counselors are ideally situated to provide intentional support to students that possess risk factors that could lead to substance use and misuse" (p. 3).

Haskins (2012) presents several ways that school counseling professionals are able to facilitate and advocate for/with students who are struggling with substance use. Beginning with the implementation of appropriate evidence-based programming aids in student success. "School counselors are trained in providing developmentally appropriate programming; consequently, they should be instrumental in connecting students to providing support that corresponds to their psychosocial needs" (Haskins, 2012, p. 4). It is of importance that a school counseling professional assesses a student's current needs before the implementation of programming is to occur. If a school counseling professional does not assess for student needs and meet students where they are at in their current journey, it may present as ineffective or potentially a waste of the school counselors time and the students.

School counseling professionals are trained and have extensive practice in performing cognitive-behavioral modalities within a counseling session. By utilizing this type of theoretical framework when working with students, it allows for one to begin problem solving and understanding one's thoughts, feelings, and how they relate to their behaviors. This can allow for

student growth to take shape by being able to rationalize substance use-like behaviors. Haskins (2012) presents that "school counselors can incorporate shaping, modeling, role playing, and assertiveness training into their work with at risk populations" (p. 4). These specific concepts of the theoretical framework of cognitive-behavioral therapy allows a student to change maladaptive behavior to a behavior that is adaptive and healthy. The school counselors offer a safe space for this work to be conducted and implemented.

"For students who are at risk for substance abuse, research indicates that school, home, and community aspects of student's lives need to be addressed and prevention cannot be a one-shot approach" (Haskins, 2012, p. 4). This notion of utilizing a wraparound approach to prevention is one that is of importance. The school counseling professional is encouraged to be inclusive to parents and other stakeholders in order to reach student success. By collaborating with parents and other important stakeholders it allows for all aspects of students needs to be met and focused on.

School counseling professionals have the power and ability to encourage pro-social engagement for students who are currently participating in substance use or those students who present as high-risk. Pro-social engagement such as joining a sport, a club, or an activity of the like can allow for a sense of belonging to develop. "Research indicated that children and adolescents who feel 'invested and emotionally connected' to the school they are attending are less likely to get involved in substance use and misuse than students who feel disconnected from their school" (Haskins, 2012, p. 4). By encouraging students to get involved within pro-social activities they find themselves more pre-occupied with said activity and have a decreased opportunity to engage in maladaptive behaviors.

One final consideration for school counseling professionals is to connect students to outside resources. If students are currently engaged with school-based substance use programs and/or supports – connecting students to outside local resources are of importance. Therefore, students are supported not only in the arena of school but also within their community as well. (Haskins, 2012).

Conclusion

A primary role of the school counseling professional is to advocate with and those students one is serving. Adolescent substance use continues to present as a problem throughout the United States and in order for that problem to diminish, it is essential to equip those who work hand in hand with adolescents with the tools to properly do so.

Research suggests that by utilizing evidenced-based school approaches to adolescent substance use we can in-turn see significant growth in eliminating this issue. School counseling professionals have the skillset and abilities to make a difference in the lives of adolescent youth who are engaging in substance use. "Counseling adolescents about drug abuse prevention can be effective, but only if counselors convey credible and age-appropriate information" (Watkins et al., 2006, p. 136), it is essential that school counseling professionals adhere to credible, evidence-based resources in order to best aid in healthy student development.

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Appendix A

Figure 1

2019 Monitoring the Future Survey
Key Findings: Percent Reporting Use of Selected Substances

	8th Grade	10th Grade	12th Grade		8th Grade	10th Grade	12th Grade
Vaping, Any				**Tobacco w/Hookah**			
Past Year	20.1	35.7	40.6	Past Year			5.6
Past Month	12.2	25.0	30.9	Past Month	1.3	2.4	4.0
Vaping, Nicotine				**Flavored Little Cigars**			
Past Year	16.5	30.7	35.3	Past Month	2.2	3.7	7.7
Past Month	9.6	19.9	25.5	**Narcotics Other than Heroin**			
Vaping, Marijuana				Past Year			2.7
Past Year	7.0	19.4	20.8	Past Month			1.0
Past Month	3.9	12.6	14.0	**Marijuana**			
Vaping, Just Flavoring				Past Year	11.8	28.8	35.7
Past Year	14.7	20.8	20.3	Past Month	6.6	18.4	22.3
Past Month	7.7	10.5	10.7	Daily	1.3	4.8	6.4
Cigarettes				**Alcohol**			
Past Month	2.3	3.4	5.7	Past Month	7.9	18.4	29.3
Daily	0.8	1.3	2.4	Daily	0.2	0.6	1.7
½ Pack +/Day	0.2	0.5	0.9	Binge	3.8	8.5	14.4

Change from 2018 to 2019

■ Significant Increase ■ Significant Decrease

Note. Significant increase in vaping nicotine and marijuana from 2018-2019.