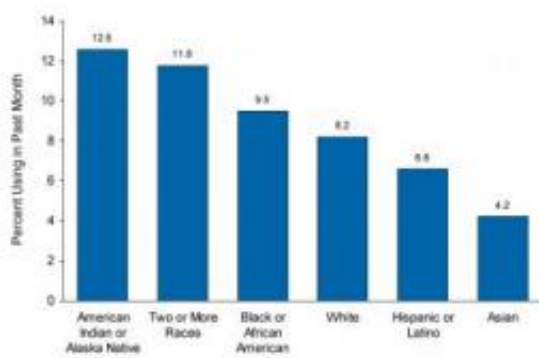


Healthy families, religious involvement buffer youth against risk factors related to drug abuse

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Race/ethnicity is shown on the horizontal axis and the percentage using illicit drugs in the past month is shown on the vertical axis. Credit: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services

American-Indian adolescents continue to have the highest rates of illicit drug use among all ethnic groups. Although previous research has found that increasing adolescent exposure to protective factors can reduce their risk for substance abuse, this has not been thoroughly examined in American-Indian adolescents. Recent findings from a University of Missouri study reveal that positive family relationships and religious affiliation can counteract risk factors - including addicted family members, exposure to violence and deviant peers - associated with drug use.

"For American-Indian youths, our study suggests that intervention and prevention programs should consider a supportive family environment as an important focus," said ManSoo Yu, assistant professor in the MU School of Social Work and Public Health Program. "Healthy relationships protect adolescents against exposure to violence and negative social environments, and therefore, may lower their risk for drug involvement. Practitioners also can encourage adolescents to connect with religious organizations, which can reduce negative peer influence and increase positive [family relationships](#)."

In the study, Yu examined the mediating roles of positive environment (healthy families and religious affiliation) on the associations between negative environment (addicted family members, deviant peers and negative school environment) and illicit drug symptoms. Identifying mediators can help clarify interrelationships among various risk and protective factors in predicting health-risk behaviors, Yu said.

Yu found that positive family relationships mediated the impact of addicted family members, violence victimization and negative school environment on illicit drug symptoms. The findings expand prior research that indicates healthy families protect adolescents from delinquent behaviors, including drug problems. Further, religious affiliation mediated the impact of deviant peers and negative school environment on positive family relationships.

Yu also found that addicted family members and deviant peers directly predicted [illicit drug use](#), while positive family relationships and [religious affiliation](#) mediated their impact on drug use. The results are consistent with previous findings that poor familial environment (notably, family members' substance problems) and misbehaving friends are strong predictors of substance problems in youths.

"Establishing effective treatment and prevention plans requires a greater

understanding of the complex associations between negative and positive variables in predicting substance use disorders such as nicotine dependence and alcohol and drug abuse," Yu said. "It is clear that strategies to help youths with drug problems can be more effective by addressing family, school and peer contexts."

The rate of illicit drug use among American-Indian adolescents age 12-17 is approximately 19 percent, significantly higher than rates for Whites, Blacks and Hispanics (around 10 percent) and Asians (6.7 percent), according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

More information: The study, "Positive family relationships and religious affiliation as mediators between negative environment and illicit drug symptoms in American Indian adolescents," was published in the July issue of Addictive Behaviors.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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