

Hispanic kids show greater risk of substance use

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Hispanic middle school students may be more likely to smoke, drink or use marijuana than their peers of other races and ethnicities, whereas Asian students seem to have the lowest risk, according to new research in the September issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

The study, of 5,500 seventh- and eighth-graders at 16 California schools, found that young Hispanic adolescents were more likely than other [students](#) to have ever used alcohol, cigarettes or marijuana. Asian students, meanwhile, had the lowest rates of substance use compared with Hispanic, white and African American students.

Moreover, the study found that some of the factors that seemed to influence kids' odds of substance use also varied by race and ethnicity.

Among Hispanic youth, it was personal factors that were linked to the risk of substance use -- including their confidence in their ability to "say no" and whether they believed drinking, smoking and drug use had more negative consequences.

In contrast, a wider range of factors was linked to Asian teens' relatively low rates of substance use -- not only those same personal-level factors but also respect for their parents and lower rates of substance use among their older siblings and peers.

The findings point to some important issues that could be addressed in substance-use prevention programs for middle school students,

according to Regina A. Shih, Ph.D., and colleagues at the research organization RAND Corporation.

"Most interventions haven't really been tailored to be culturally appropriate," Shih explained. For example, "skills training," where kids learn how to resist pressure to smoke, drink or use drugs, could help address one of the personal factors that was connected to Hispanic students' higher rates of substance use.

Similarly, interventions that encourage positive parent-child communication and boost kids' sense of responsibility to their parents might help maintain lower rates of substance use -- and could be particularly effective for young Asian teens.

Shih said, however, that the researchers are not suggesting that such targeted efforts only be offered to students of certain ethnicities -- but that they could be widely applied in prevention programs to help the broadest range of kids possible. Many existing interventions target these types of personal factors and address adolescent and parent communication. "It is important for parents to be aware that many youth initiate substance use during the middle school years, and parents can help their teen make healthier choices by monitoring their activities and talking with them about these issues," Shih said.

Of all students in the study, 22 percent said they had ever used alcohol, 10 percent admitted to smoking at some point, and 7 percent reported marijuana use. In general, the odds of [substance use](#) were highest among Hispanic students, lowest among Asians and not statistically different between white and African American students.

When it came to drinking, for example, 26 percent of Hispanic students said they had ever tried alcohol, versus 21 percent of black students, 18 percent of whites and just below 10 percent of Asians.

When the researchers accounted for several other factors -- including gender and students' family structures -- Hispanic middle schoolers still had a higher probability, and Asian students still had a lower probability, of ever using cigarettes, alcohol or marijuana, compared with white students.

Using this large longitudinal sample, Shih's team will be able to continue to follow young adolescents over time to see which personal, family and school factors seem to predict the initiation or worsening of teens' smoking, drinking or drug use.

More information: Shih, R. A., Miles, J. N. V., Tucker, J. S., Zhou, A. J., & D'Amico, E. J. (September 2010). Racial/Ethnic Differences in Adolescent Substance Use: Mediation by Individual, Family, and School Factors. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 71 (5), 640-651.

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