

Substance use, aggression linked in new study focused on Latino youth

May 14 2013

(Medical Xpress)—Are high school age students who show aggression toward their peers more likely to consume alcohol, tobacco and marijuana? A new study of Latino adolescents in Kansas City, Mo., confirms this idea. But the linkage to substance use is strongest with a particular type of aggression that researchers dub "proactive."

"The type of aggression is based on the motivation behind the behavior," said Paula Fite, assistant professor in psychology and applied behavioral science at the University of Kansas. "Why are you aggressive? Proactive aggression boils down to an attitude where, 'You have something that I want—and I'm going to get it.'"

In the study, Fite and her colleagues found a consistent link between proactive, or goal-oriented, aggression and substance use among 152 predominantly Hispanic [high school students](#). The findings are set to appear in the forthcoming issue of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse*.

For [males and females](#), the tie between proactive aggression and use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana was independent from other known [risk factors](#), such as a prevalence of violence in students' neighborhoods. The investigation builds on earlier work looking at youth of various ethnic backgrounds.

"Proactive aggression is a robust risk factor for substance use, initiation of use in particular, among youth," Fite said. "Now that we've found

proactive aggression to be a risk factor for substance use in Latino youth—and we previously found this link in Caucasian and African-[American populations](#)—we can say without a doubt this is the behavior that we should be targeting for the prevention of substance use."

The KU researcher said that proactive aggression fits a developmental model of risk where one [problem behavior](#) puts youth at risk for engaging in a range of harmful personal conduct.

"You have a characteristic where an individual isn't focusing on any [negative consequences](#)," said Fite. "All they see is that they have a desired goal they want to obtain—and they're going to do whatever it takes to get that. They might think, 'I want to be the popular kid, so I'm going to make a fool of you.' It's an underlying personality type and the way they've learned to navigate the world."

Fite and her co-investigators at KU found that proactive aggression is associated with the development of "antisocial and delinquent" behavior, such as use of substances, which can start early in childhood and worsen through teen years and adulthood.

"With regard to substance use it's, 'This feels good. I want to have a good time. So, I'm going to do it,'" Fite said. "They're not thinking, 'I could get arrested. What if my parents find out? I won't be able to get up for school in time.'"

Fite said she hoped the research could inform policymakers, educators, psychologists and social workers alike.

"If you look at the cost of child-onset substance use, one individual is costing society approximately \$1 million over the course of their lifetime," she said. "We know that we need to act early and provide

programming, funding and appropriate laws in order to effectively intervene. For schools, knowing whom to look out for, knowing the rates of substance use and contributing factors would be useful. For clinicians, you need to treat not just the substance use but the factors that contributed to the substance use."

Fite said that proactively aggressive teens should stand out to teachers and counselors as being particularly at-risk for substance use.

"There is something unique about kids who are willing to engage in proactively aggressive behavior," she said. "They're not doing this to protect themselves or because they feel threatened. They're doing it because they want to get something out of this, because they've learned that it will help them get what they want in life."

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Substance use, aggression linked in new study focused on Latino youth (2013, May 14) retrieved 1 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-05-substance-aggression-linked-focused-latino.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--