

Family support vital to prevent teen substance use in border regions, study says

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New research from the University of Arizona Health Sciences Comprehensive Pain and Addiction Center found that high levels of family support may prevent substance use among teens who live in

border towns on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Adolescence is marked by changes and challenges, including the potential for substance abuse. In the United States, by their final year in high school, 46.7% of youth have tried illicit drugs, according to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics. Prior research shows social and [environmental factors](#) found in border towns can increase the potential of high stress, which is a well-known risk factor for adolescent [substance abuse](#).

"Many border adolescents reported high perceptions of disordered neighborhood stress, border community and immigration stress and normalization of drug trafficking. Teens living on both sides of the border face heightened [risk factors](#) for some types of substance use," said first author Allison Huff, DHEd, member of the Comprehensive Pain and Addiction Center and assistant professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the UArizona College of Medicine—Tucson.

The paper, [published in the](#) *Journal of Migration and Health*, found that teens with low family support demonstrated a higher risk of using any substance, including alcohol, compared with those with high family support.

The research team analyzed data from 396 [high school](#) students residing on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border who reported risk factors of perceived high disordered neighborhood stress, border community and immigration stress, and normalization of drug trafficking.

The data was collected as part of the Border Adolescent Substance Use Survey, led by co-author Elizabeth "Libby" Salerno Valdez, Ph.D., MPH, assistant professor in the Department of Community Health and Prevention at the Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health.

"We were looking at adolescent substance use from the perspective of young people because they're the most affected and they understand their environment," Salerno Valdez said, adding that the team went through months of statistical analysis using logistic regression to identify family support as a critical factor in protecting teens from substance use.

The study's insights may help policymakers and [health care professionals](#) in their efforts to prevent substance use among teens. Prevention programs tailored to the border region could emphasize strengthening family support as a preventive factor against teen substance use.

"The strengths of a community should be considered when thinking about any type of program or intervention," Huff said. "Ways to strengthen family support should be considered in school counseling assessments, community programs, health care screenings and other social services."

More information: Allison J Huff et al, Does high family support protect against substance use in adolescents who perceive high disordered neighborhood stress, border community and immigration stress or normalization of drug trafficking at the US-Mexico border? Analysis of the BASUS survey, *Journal of Migration and Health* (2023). DOI: [10.1016/j.jmh.2023.100164](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2023.100164)

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