

EXPLORING ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SUBSTANCE USE AND ADOLESCENT  
DELINQUENCY:  
AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescent delinquency and substance use are significant concerns that influence youth development and overall well-being in the United States. This study focuses on adolescent substance use and delinquent behaviors. Particularly, it investigates relationships between three forms of adolescent substance use (social, hard, and non-medical prescription drugs) and delinquent behaviors. Although many recent studies have investigated the relationship between substance abuse and adolescent delinquency, few have explored moderating effects from an eco-systems perspective. To contribute to the existing knowledge, the present study investigates three potential moderating effects representing different layers of the ecological system in order to advance understanding of more complicated and multifaceted relationships between substance use and adolescent delinquency.

The sample of the present study was extracted from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2017 (McCance-Katz, 2019). The survey involved a nationally representative sample of adolescents ( $N=13,722$ ). The three previously mentioned forms of substance use were positively associated with both violent and theft delinquent behaviors. In addition, several factors were found to moderate the relationship between adolescent substance use and involvement with delinquent behaviors. Most importantly, positive drug prevention communication significantly moderated relationships between substance use and delinquency. Adolescent substance users who had ever received any positive drug prevention communication via mass media were less likely than those who had not received such messages to engage in both violent and theft behavior

The findings are highly relevant to social work practice, research, and policy related to substance use and adolescent delinquency. Whereas many interventions to reduce adolescent delinquency or to mitigate negative effects of substance use focus on the individual and the family, the study results illustrate that larger social systems, including systems delivering mass communication, such as social media, may also have potential to mitigate negative effects of adolescent substance use. Moreover, the findings suggest a number of future directions for further investigation of the role of family relationships and positive drug prevention communication in reducing adolescent substance use and delinquent behaviors in the United States.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

- a* Cronbach's index of internal consistency
- df* Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
- F* Fisher's F ratio: A ration of two variances
- M* Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
- SD* Standard deviation: a measure of the extent of variation for a group as a whole, calculated as the square root of variance
- SE* Standard Error: A measure of the statistical accuracy of an estimate, equal to the standard deviation of the theoretical distribution of a large population of such estimate
- p* Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
- r* Pearson product-moment correlation
- t* Computed value of t test
- < Less than
- = Equal

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Definition of Risk Factors.....	2
Prevalence of Delinquency among Adolescents.....	3
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
Ecological Systems Theory in Social Work .....	5
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
Environmental Resilience and Risk Perspectives of Adolescent Delinquency .....	11
Major Risk Factors of Adolescent Delinquency .....	13
Substance Use and Adolescent Delinquency .....	17
Family Relationships .....	24
Drug-Related Prevention and Adolescent Delinquency .....	30
Gaps in the Literature, Unanswered Questions, and Need for This Study .....	35

Statement of the Problem.....	38
The Significance of the Present Study.....	40
Chapter Summary .....	41
CHAPTER 4: METHODS.....	42
Sample.....	42
Measures and Variables.....	44
Data Analysis Strategy.....	50
Chapter Summary .....	61
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS .....	63
Descriptive Findings .....	63
Bivariate Findings.....	71
Regression Results.....	82
Moderation Effects.....	86
Comparing Regression Models.....	98
Chapter Summary .....	99
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	101
Summary of Findings.....	101
Values of the Theoretical Framework.....	103
Most Important Findings .....	104



Implications for Social Work Practice.....	112
Implications for Social Work Future Research.....	114
Implications for Social Work Policy.....	115
Limitations .....	117
Chapter Summary .....	119
REFERENCES .....	120

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Summary of Key Ecological Risk Factors for Adolescent Delinquency.....	34
2. Delinquent Behaviors Measures.....	48
3. Measures of Independent Variables and Control Variable.....	49
4. Missing Values in Adolescent Delinquent Behaviors.....	51
5. Missing Values in Substance Use.....	52
6. Missing Values in Moderation Variables.....	52
7. Statistics Before Applying Multiple Imputation via Chain Equations.....	53
8. Statistics After Applying Multiple Imputation via Chain Equations.....	53
9. Box-Cox Power Transformation to Normality of Continuous Independent Variables.....	56
10. Global Test of Linear Model Assumptions.....	58
11. Multi-collinearity Test for All Explanatory Variables.....	58
12. Descriptive Information about Outcomes of Total Sample.....	65
13. Descriptive Information about Explanatory Factors of Total Sample.....	69
14. Descriptive Information about Computed Variables of Total Sample.....	71
15. Welch Two Sample T-Test of Adolescent Violent Behaviors.....	77
16. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation for Adolescent Violent Behavior.....	78
17. One-Way ANOVA for Parent-Child Conflict and Adolescent Violent Behaviors.....	78
18. Welch Two Sample T-Test of Adolescent Theft Behaviors.....	78
19. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation for Adolescent Theft Behaviors.....	79
20. One-Way ANOVA for Parent-Child Conflict and Adolescent Theft Behaviors.....	79

21. One-Way ANOVA for Moderation Effects and Adolescent Gender.....	79
22. One-Way ANOVA for Moderation Effects and Adolescent Race/Ethnicity.....	80
23. One-Way ANOVA for Moderation Effects and Adolescent Race/Ethnicity.....	80
24. One-Way ANOVA for Moderation Effects and Adolescent Race/Ethnicity.....	81
25. One-Way ANOVA for Moderation Effects and Adolescent Race/Ethnicity.....	81
26. Multivariate Regression Model 1.....	84
27. Multivariate Regression Model 2 with Control Variables.....	85
28. Multivariate Regression Model 3 with Moderating Effects.....	88
29. Multivariate Regression Model 4 with Interaction Terms.....	96
30. Multivariate Regression Model Comparing.....	99

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual Framework: Family Relationships as Moderators on the Relationship between Substance Use and Adolescent Delinquency.....	37
2. Conceptual Framework: Positive Drug Prevention Communication as a Moderator on the Relationship between Substance Use and Adolescent Delinquency.....	37
3. The Ecological System Theory: Moderators across Different Eco-Systems on the Relationship between Substance Use and Adolescent Delinquency.....	38
4. Distributions of Moderators before Transformed.....	57
5. Between Groups Means Plots of Parent-Child Conflict and Violent Behaviors.....	75
6. Between Groups Means Plots of Parent-Child Conflict and Theft Behaviors.....	76
7. Moderation Effects of Positive Drug Prevention Communication on the Relationship between Violent Behaviors and Hard Substance Use.....	94
8. Moderation Effects of Parent-Child Conflict on the Relationship between Theft Behaviors and Social Substance Use.....	91
9. Moderation Effects of Parental Support on the Relationship between Theft Behaviors and Hard Substance Use.....	92
10. Moderation Effects of Never Have Family Conflict on the Relationship between Theft Behaviors and Hard Substance Use.....	93
11. Moderation Effects of Positive Drug Prevention Communication on the Relationship between Theft Behaviors and Hard Substance Use.....	94
12. Moderation Effects of Parental Support on the Relationship between Theft Behaviors and Non-Medical Prescription Drug Use.....	95