

Parental Influences on Inhalant Use by Children

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Characteristics of the parents of Mexican American drug users were examined. Interviews with 78 mothers showed that a large percentage were not following the traditional path of marriage, childbirth, and caring for their children at home on a full-time basis. Adherence to traditional roles was related to the mother's age, education, alcohol use, depression, and her child's depression, but was not related to heroin drug use, criminality, or home environment. In addition, traditional behaviors were not related to her husband's criminality, alcohol, and drug use, nor to her child's criminality and drug use. Indicators of household stability—such as the parents' marital status, full employment for the father, and absence of maternal depression—were related to the child's use of drugs and related problems.

Of particular interest in adolescent drug use is the question of etiology, especially the role played by parents and family. Family structure and background differences have often been found between drug users and non-users (Tennant, Detels, & Clark, 1975; Jurich, Poison, Jurich, & Bates, 1985; Jurich & Poison, 1984; Birmingham & Sheehy, 1984). This literature also suggests that the families of drug users are likely to be characterized by poor communication, wherein conflicts are not discussed and resolved openly and the expression of anger is forbidden. Moreover, the family

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environment often appears unstable or volatile; discipline is usually either laissez-faire or authoritarian, and it may even fluctuate between these two extremes. Parents are often separated or divorced, may actively reject one or more of their children, and show undisguised hostility and anger in the family setting. All of these attributes contribute to an unstable environment from which the child may attempt to escape via drug use.

Because most studies on the family structure of drug users have been based on populations of Blacks or Whites, the family of Mexican American adolescent drug users has not received the systematic or empirical research it deserves. The Mexican American family often lives in poverty and must deal with discrimination — two factors linked in the literature to increased drug use (Morales, 1984). Another factor that warrants study is the changing role of the mother in the Mexican American family, representing a potential source of instability or confusion for the traditional family structure. The Mexican American mother historically has been the caretaker and the major source of stability for the family. Like women of other ethnic groups today, however, many Mexican American mothers spend considerable time outside the home working and are often divorced or separated from their husbands. No longer is the mother always physically available to her children. She also may be emotionally unavailable due to pressures or confusion related to her changing role (Carillo, 1982).

The current study examines characteristics of the parents of Mexican American drug users (with particular emphasis on the mothers), together with indicators of the home environment and psychological status, in relation to their child's behavioral and emotional adjustment. In addition, the extent to which mothers resemble the traditional Mexican American housewife, and how it relates to their children's drug use and criminality, are examined.

Method

Sample

The study was based on Mexican American youth ($N = 175$) who were between the ages of 13 and 17 at the time they entered the Youth Advocacy Program (YAP), a drug abuse prevention program in southeast Austin, Texas, between March 1981 and December 1985. They were referred to the YAP primarily due to behavioral problems, including involvement with drugs. Of these, 150 (86%) were successfully traced for a follow-up interview an average of 4 years later, and face-to-face interviews were completed with 110 (63%). Of those not interviewed, 15 (9%) had moved from the Austin

metropolitan area, 13 (7%) were in prison, and 3 (2%) were dead. The remaining 25 incentives of \$10 were paid for completed

An attempt was also made to locate the 11 who were interviewed. Because of the small sample, the population of eligible mothers was small. Of the 11 mothers who were interviewed, representing 100% of those who refused to be interviewed, for a refusal rate of 100%, 2 were dead, 1 had moved from the area with no trace.

Ages of the 78 mothers ranged from 30 to 49 (34%) or 40s (51%). Fifty-nine percent had less than a high school while 21% finished high school and 4% had a college degree. Mothers were married at the time of the interview, 61% divorced. Sixty-one percent of these mothers were full-time and 14% working part-time. Employed by 36% of the mothers, and an "sometimes."

Information about most of the fathers ($N = 73$), but the completeness of this information was not as good as for the mothers. It was also difficult to distinguish between "fathers" versus "fathers" in some interviews, mothers therefore may be less reliable than fathers and their mothers.

Measures

Data collected from interviews with youth included information about sociodemographic characteristics, drug use, and psychological well-being. Youth with their mothers addressed age, marital status, employment status, and socioeconomic status. Family functioning, including religiosity and the home environment, was represented by six scales gathered upon the child's admission to the program (Simpson, 1988). These scales measured effects of parent-child relationship (coefficient alpha reliability = .74), parental warmth (coefficient alpha reliability = .74), parental conflict (coefficient alpha reliability = .74), family problem-solving (coefficient alpha reliability = .75), and family warmth (coefficient

metropolitan area, 13 (7%) were in prison, 9 (5%) refused to be interviewed, and 3 (2%) were dead. The remaining 25 cases (14%) were not located. Incentives of \$10 were paid for completed interviews.

An attempt was also made to locate the mothers of each of the 110 youth who were interviewed. Because 11 mothers had multiple children in the sample, the population of eligible mothers was 98. Seventy-eight of these mothers were interviewed, representing a completion rate of 79%. Seventeen refused to be interviewed, for a refusal rate of 17%; of the remaining 4 mothers, 2 were dead, 1 had moved from the interview area, and 1 disappeared with no trace.

Ages of the 78 mothers ranged from 30 to 71, with 85% falling in the 30s (34%) or 40s (51%). Fifty-nine percent had less than 10 years of education, while 21% finished high school and 4% had attended college. Only 50% of the mothers were married at the time of follow-up; 43% were separated or divorced. Sixty-one percent of these women worked, with 47% working full-time and 14% working part-time. Frequent church attendance was reported by 36% of the mothers, and an additional 43% attended church "sometimes."

Information about most of the fathers was obtained from the mothers ($N = 73$), but the completeness of this information varied depending on the questions asked. It was also difficult to distinguish between "current husbands" versus "fathers" in some interviews, and behaviors attributed to fathers therefore may be less reliable than information obtained for the youth and their mothers.

Measures

Data collected from interviews with youth at intake and follow-up included information about sociodemographic background, family life, criminality, drug use, and psychological well-being. The face-to-face interviews with their mothers addressed age, marital status, education status, employment status, and socioeconomic status. Family life questions were also asked, including religiosity and the home environment in which the child was raised. Home environment was represented by six scales developed from data gathered upon the child's admission to the prevention program (McBride & Simpson, 1988). These scales measured effects of parental control (coefficient alpha reliability = .74), parental warmth (coefficient alpha reliability = .91), parental conflict (coefficient alpha reliability = .77), family arguments (coefficient alpha reliability = .74), family problem behavior (coefficient alpha reliability = .75), and family warmth (coefficient alpha reliability = .86).

Socioeconomic status. This scale was based on several indicators with lower socioeconomic status (SES) being represented by unemployment, not having graduated from high school, and living in crowded conditions.

Depression. At intake, no measure of depression was obtained for the youth or their parents. To assess depression at follow-up, youth and their mothers completed the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961) and were asked questions about suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Each of the 21 BDI items was answered in a graded series of four self-evaluative statements varying in severity, with the least severe scored "0" and the most severe scored "3." Summation of these item responses result in scores from 0 to 63, with values of 0 to 9 representing no depression, 10 to 15 mild depression, 16 to 23 moderate depression, and 24 to 63 severe depression (Beck et al., 1961; Bumberry, Oliver, & McClure, 1978). This inventory has been used widely and is regarded as reliable and valid (Beck et al., 1961; Knight, 1984).

Learned helplessness. This index was composed of three questions that specifically ask about hopelessness and loss of control, the hallmarks of learned helplessness. It had a coefficient alpha reliability of .75.

Anxiety. This index was defined by a set of medical symptoms commonly indicative of anxiety and had a coefficient alpha reliability of .71.

Drug use. Drug use at intake and follow-up was determined from self-reports indicating any use of marijuana, downers, uppers, inhalants, cocaine, psychedelics, or opiates. Whether or not the individual had been in drug treatment was also determined.

Alcohol use was assessed by a composite index, taking into account the amount of alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, and hard liquor) consumed and several symptoms of severe alcohol problems such as drinking more than one intended, getting drunk, having an alcohol-related arrest in the last year, morning drinking, and having the shakes or tremors because of needing a drink. The more of these behaviors that were present, the larger the alcohol use score. This scale had a range of 0 (no drinking) to 7 (severe drinking) and a coefficient alpha reliability of .71.

Criminality. Criminality scores were based on the number of arrests, the types of arrests, and the lifetime number of days spent in jail or prison. The coefficient alpha reliability was .76.

Results

Traditionality. A majority of the mothers in the sample did not fit the traditional image of the Mexican American mother, defined as a married woman who does not work outside the home in order to care for her children and extended family. Indeed, 72% of the mothers were currently unmarried and/or working at a part-time or full-time job. Those filling the traditional married homemaker role were older, less educated, and less likely to use alcohol in the last year; they also had higher depression scores. (Differences cited in this article were statistically significant, $p < .05$.)

These two groups of mothers were compared in terms of their children's behaviors at follow-up, and there were no significant differences in the measures of criminality, drug use, or treatment history of the youth. However, children of traditional mothers scored significantly higher on depression (corresponding with the significantly higher depression found among traditional mothers themselves).

Marital status. Mothers who were currently married (at the time of follow-up) were older, attended church more frequently, and had lower rates of past arrests and incarceration than unmarried mothers. The husbands of currently married mothers were more likely to be employed and have no arrest history. The children of currently married mothers used fewer drugs in the first year after the YAP prevention program, were less likely to have ever used inhalants, and had fewer arrests. Marital status was not related, however, to any other type of drug use by the child in the last year before the follow-up.

Alcohol use. Mothers' problems with alcohol use were related to overall drug use severity and alcohol problems of their children. In particular, mothers' arrest frequency for alcohol-related reasons was positively associated with heavier drug use by the child ($r = .23, p < .04$) and with their alcohol problems ($r = .62, p < .001$). In addition, the mother's alcohol use correlated significantly with child's drug use in the first year after leaving the YAP prevention program ($r = .22, p < .04$).

Depression. The prevalence of clinical depression among youth and their mothers at the time of follow-up, as measured by the BDI, was high. Among the youth, 13% had BDI scores in the severe range, an additional 13% scored in the moderate range, and 18% scored in the mild range. The mean depression score for youth was 11.1, with a standard deviation of 9.8. When the criminal activity scores of moderately and severely depressed youths were

compared with those with mild or no depression, the more severely depressed group was significantly more involved in criminal activity. Drug and alcohol use measures, however, were not significantly related to depression. Two of the FFS variables were significantly related to depression scores for youth, including level of family conflict ($r = .24, p < .01$) and self-esteem at follow-up ($r = -.47, p < .0001$). That is, higher family conflict and lower self-esteem were associated with higher depression scores.

The prevalence of depression was also high among mothers; 8% were severely depressed, 12% were moderately depressed, and 15% were mildly depressed. The mean score for mothers on BDI was 9.6, with a standard deviation of 8.6. Gender of the child, SES, and mothers' age were not significantly correlated with their depression scores, nor were criminal activity, drug use, or alcohol use of their children. Mothers' church attendance was negatively correlated with their own depression scores ($r = -.23, p < .05$), and there was a positive relationship between depression scores for youth and their mothers ($r = .32, p < .005$).

Fathers. Eighty-four percent of the fathers were reportedly employed at follow-up, with 61 % working full-time and 23% working part-time. Working full-time was related to the child's history of inhalant use; that is, a larger percentage of non-users (80%) had male household role models who were employed full-time than did those who had used inhalants (52%). In addition, youth whose father figure was employed full-time reported less chronic alcohol and drug use in the first year after leaving the YAP prevention program.

Only a small percentage of the fathers was described as having previously used illegal drugs (12%); on the other hand, over three-fourths used alcohol (77%). Neither measure, however, was related to inhalant use history or drug use severity of the child at follow-up. A large percentage of fathers had been arrested in the past (59%), most of them (41%) more than once. More than half (56%) of the husbands had been jailed, but their criminal history was not significantly related to the child's use of inhalants.

Home environment. Many of the youth came from broken homes and had other related problems indicative of instability in the household. Substantial percentages of the mothers in this sample had been previously arrested (36%) or jailed (31 %), and among fathers for whom information was available, 59% had been arrested and 56% had been jailed. On the other hand, the percentage of mothers using drugs other than alcohol was small; only 14% of the mothers had used drugs (other than alcohol in the past year), and 9% had been in drug

treatment. Mothers reported that only 12% (other than alcohol) in the past year.

Finally, the six home environment variables (family warmth, parental conflict, family arguments, family warmth) were examined in relation to mother's marital status and employment. No statistically significant relationships were

Psychopathology. Since one of the factors in youth is parental psychopathology, depression, anxiety, learned helplessness, and suicide attempts were examined further. A substantial amount of evidence of emotional or mental problems was found. In the sample, 18% included reports of mild-to-severe depression, 42% anxiety, 22% suicidal ideation, and 13% reported

Canonical correlation analyses with components were used to examine the relationship between psychological adjustment with selected background measures and with children's behavioral measures. The analyses showed significant relationships between measures for mothers and fathers and their children's outcomes. Background measures for mothers included depression, criminality, drug and alcohol use, and suicide ideation. For fathers, the measures included self-esteem, suicide ideation, drug and alcohol use, and criminality and drug use.

The rotated canonical structure components showed that on one factor, suicidal tendencies of their educational level, drug use, suicide ideation, and to their children's level of depression. (In the analysis of fathers, suicide ideation and suicide attempts of mothers were related to their husbands' environment, characterized by less warmth and maternal depression, anxiety, and being unemployed and to their children's suicide ideation. In the analysis of fathers, suicide ideation by mothers were directly related to their husbands' environment).

In another analysis, the separate components for marital status and employment were examined in relation to the child's psychological status using the variables noted above, unemployed mothers reported more psychological problems for their children. In addition, the children of currently unemployed mothers

treatment. Mothers reported that only 12% of the fathers had used drugs (other than alcohol) in the past year.

Finally, the six home environment scales (parental control, parental warmth, parental conflict, family arguments, family problems behavior, and family warmth) were examined in relation to traditional status of the mothers, mother's marital status and employment, and husband's employment status. No statistically significant relationships were found.

Psychopathology. Since one of the factors sometimes linked to drug use in youth is parental psychopathology, combined measures of mother's depression, anxiety, learned helplessness, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts were examined further. A substantial percentage of the mothers showed some evidence of emotional or mental health problems; for instance, 18% included reports of mild-to-severe depression, 6% learned helplessness, 42% anxiety, 22% suicidal ideation, and 13% had attempted suicide.

Canonical correlation analyses with rotation of the canonical structure components were used to examine relationships of these indicators of maternal psychological adjustment with selected background and behavioral measures and with children's behavioral measures. In addition, the relationships between measures for mothers and fathers were analyzed in a second analysis. Background measures for mothers included sociodemographic characteristics, criminality, drug and alcohol use, and family environment. For their children, the measures included self-esteem, self-derogation, depression, suicide ideation, drug and alcohol use, and criminality; for fathers, the measures included criminality and drug use.

The rotated canonical structure components in the first analysis showed that on one factor, suicidal tendencies of mothers were positively related to their educational level, drug use, suicide ideation, anxiety, alcohol and drug use, and to their children's level of depression. On a second factor, suicide ideation and suicide attempts of mothers were related to poor family environment, characterized by less warmth and more conflicts. On a third factor, measures of maternal depression, anxiety, and learned helplessness were related to being unemployed and to their children's depression and suicide ideation. In the analysis of fathers, suicide attempts and learned helplessness by mothers were directly related to their husbands' alcohol use and criminality.

In another analysis, the separate components of mother's traditionality (i.e., marital status and employment) were examined in relation to both her own and her child's psychological status using two-way ANOVA models. As noted above, unemployed mothers reported more depression, as did their children. In addition, the children of currently married mothers reported more

self-esteem than those of unmarried mothers, and children of traditional mothers reported more school satisfaction.

Discussion

This study addressed two questions. The first was whether or not environmental factors frequently associated with drug use also applied to the homes of Mexican American youth. Although scales measuring home environment typically did not predict inhalant use, other indicators of family stability suggested home environment to be a factor in alcohol and other drug use. Overall, there was a higher rate of divorce than generally expected in a predominantly Catholic sample, especially given that 79% of these mothers attended church at least once a month. Family stability, as indicated by the mother's marital status and depression and by the father's unemployment and alcohol use, was positively associated with alcohol and drug use by the child.

The second question addressed whether mothers in this small sample fit the traditional stereotype of the Mexican American homemaker and family caretaker. Marital status and employment showed that a large number of the present sample of Mexican American mothers did not follow the traditional path of marriage, childbirth, and caring for the children at home on a full-time basis. In terms of predicting drug use and criminality, however, this nontraditional role appeared to be unrelated to criminality or drug use of their children.

Factors emerging as important predictors of youth drug use and related problems were marital status and emotional adjustment of the mother. Even though unemployed mothers presumably have more time to spend with their children, it may be of a lower quality if the mother is depressed. The mothers' depression also appears to be directly associated with their children's depression. It is reasonable to assume manifestations of clinical depression not only lowers the quality of interaction between a mother and her children, but also creates a poorer home environment. In this sample, youth used more drugs, were more depressed, and made more suicide attempts when their mothers were depressed.

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Smith et al. / Parental Influences 275

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