Factors Related to Alcohol Use among Adolescent 13 to 15 Years Old

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Introduction: Despite a minimum legal drinking age of 18, many adolescents in Puerto Rico consume alcohol. Moreover, results from the USA 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health show that persons who initiated alcohol use before age 15 were more than five times as likely to report alcohol abuse/dependence than persons who first drank at age 21.21 Recent studies also suggest that individual, family, school and community factors influence the experimentation and use of alcohol among adolescents. This study examines the factors that place adolescents in Puerto Rico, ages 13 to 15, at risk for alcohol use.

Methods: The sample for this study (n=550) was comprised of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 residing in poor neighborhoods. This sample was selected from census blocks surrounding identified coping areas (outdoor drug, selling areas). Parents and their offspring were interviewed.

Analysis: Descriptive and bivariate analyses were used to calculate the prevalence of alcohol use and the association with a selected number of variables. A multiple logistic regression model adjusted by parent’s alcohol diagnoses and drug use, single mother household, mother’s depression symptomatology and adolescent’s gender was performed.

Results: Overall, 21.3% of the adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 had drank alcohol. Figure 1 shows an age-related increase of 21.4% in alcohol use from 13.8% of 13-year-old to 35.2% of 15-year olds. A similar pattern was observed by gender but with no significant differences. (Figure 2)

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Table 2: In presence of five or more individual factors, adolescents show a high prevalence of alcohol use.

The highest reported individual factors by age are as follows: age 13, oppositional defiant disorder and violence; age 14, suicide ideation and attempt; and age 15, premature sex.

Table 3: Father alcohol use was a significant family factor for adolescents age 14. Moreover, family member drug use was a significant factor for adolescents ages 14 and 15. Cigarette use was a risk for all ages.

Table 4: Violence, looking older, other students using drugs, and alcohol access were the main factors related to alcohol use for adolescents age 13. For ages 14 and 15, suicide ideation, father alcohol abuse and friends’ cigarette use were the factors related to alcohol use. Cigarette access and friends use by cigarette, depression and symptom patterns were the classes factors that were related to alcohol use among adolescents age 15.

Conclusion: Similarly to other studies, alcohol use continues to be highly prevalent among Hispanic adolescents residing in Puerto Rico. There is a need to develop prevention programs and specific proactive initiatives to address alcohol use and progression among adolescents.

References: