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Ed Studies Senior Research Project

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**The Culture of Drug Use
During the School Day
in an Urban School
System**

Background

- Institute for Community Research
 - “MDMA and STD/HIV Risk Among Hidden Networks of Ecstasy-Using Young Adults” study
- Noticed pattern of drug use before and during the school day in interviews

Research Question

- What is the culture of drug use, prevention, and enforcement during the school day among a group of students in an urban school system, and awareness of this by school staff?

Literature

Study in Ireland:

- Connor, S., Van Hout, M. C. (2008). A qualitative study of Irish teacher's perspective of student substance use.
 - examined teacher's perspectives of student substance use in Irish secondary level schools
 - Results:
 - Teachers reported more training on how to approach students who they think are using would be helpful because teachers felt uncomfortable or unable to teach their students about drug and alcohol use because they are not trained to do so

- Similar to my study

Methods

- Conducted in-depth interviews with 3 groups:
 - Users: called back participants from MDMA study
 - Non-users: College students who attended high school in this urban school system
 - School personnel: Connected through ICR
- Ethics: All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants

Findings

- High school students in this urban school system do use drugs before and during the school day, but perceptions of incidents vary within three groups: users, non-users, and school personnel.
- Whether or not a student uses drugs greatly affects their high school experience because school personnel tend to stigmatize users, putting them in an out-group, while forming relationships and providing extra help to non-users.
- Limited consequences of being under the influence of drugs in class, along with a great prevalence of drugs in popular culture (i.e., music lyrics, TV shows, life styles of famous music artists) form a drug enabling mainstream culture in this urban high school system.

Data Analysis...

School Personnel

- Users:
 - Stressed - used drugs as coping mechanism, offered immediate enjoyable situation during class time, and peer pressure influence
 - Stigmatized based on a single behavior

- Non-Users:
 - High achieving, more likely to go to college
 - Had close relationships with them

Non-users

■ Users:

- Used drugs due to lack of education of effects, family use, peer pressure, sign of being “cool”

- Due to culture users are a part of - no blame on users

■ School personnel:

- Aware of student use, but did not act on it
- Two types of classes: honors/AP vs. remedial

Users

- Non-users:
 - Very small population
 - Now are heavy users with serious substance abuse and dependence
- School Personnel:
 - Did not acknowledge drug use
 - Security guards

Perceptions of Student Use

- Differed greatly between groups
 - Users: everyone used drugs before and during school
 - Non-users: separate group of students used drugs before and during school
 - School Personnel: some, but not most, students used before and during school, but most students used on the weekends or after school

Popular Culture

- Greatly affects student use
- BET/MTV “fairy-tale”
- Music lyrics
- Role models

Different norms & values

- Health class
 - Mixed messages about certain drugs
 - Effective for certain drugs
- Perceptions of marijuana
- Culture of drugs in the home
- Perceived effects of drugs
- Disconnect between admin and staff

Significance

- Where does the truth lie?
- Enforcement of simple rules could change student drug use during and before school
- Health class
 - Needs to start earlier
 - Should address marijuana use

Implications for Further Research

- How do certain students resist pressures from family, friends, and popular culture?
- All three groups need to work together to address student drug use
- Marijuana - Why is this considered a soft drug among users?
- This study confirms the need for further research

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