

Same Family, Different Planet: Comparing the Views of Teens and Parents on Their Relationship and Potential Substance Use

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Introduction

The annual "National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse," now in its 16th year, allows The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University to identify factors that increase or decrease the likelihood that a teen will smoke, drink, or use drugs. The survey consistently finds that parental engagement—having a good relationship, open communication, frequent family dinners, knowing what children are doing and who their friends are, and setting and enforcing rules about not using substances—is one of the most protective factors against adolescent substance use.

Statement of Problem/Hypothesis

The ability to link parent and teen responses allows us to examine the degree to which responses differ and the extent to which disagreement between pairs is associated with teens' risk of substance use. We hypothesized that teens in pairs with the highest level of teen/parent agreement would be least likely to engage in substance use.

Explanation of design and methodology

The sample for this study comes from KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based online panel designed to be representative of the entire United States population. The panel is created by randomly selecting households using Address Based Sampling (ABS) (2009 to present) and random-digit dial sampling (RDD) (2000-2009). This design assures that samples drawn from the 50,000 KnowledgePanel® members can be generalized to the U.S. population and reliably to population subgroups, such as families with teenagers as in this study. When recruited households are found to not have Internet access, KN provides them with a computer and an Internet connection so that they, too, can be represented. This more inclusive coverage makes KnowledgePanel® unique among large online panels.

For CASA's National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse, Knowledge Networks invited, screened, consented, and interviewed 456 parent/teen (age 12 to 17) pairs. Data collection took place from April 9 - 27, 2010.

Results

As illustrated in Figure 1, parents and teens agree more about the extent to which the teen is exposed to substance use at school and through peers, and less about the quality of their relationship. Most troubling is the extent to which parents and teens disagree about the likelihood of the teen's future drug use. Further analysis found that 43.8 percent of parents rated the likelihood of teen's future drug use higher than did their teen.

Figure 1: Disagreement in Paired Responses of Teen & Parent

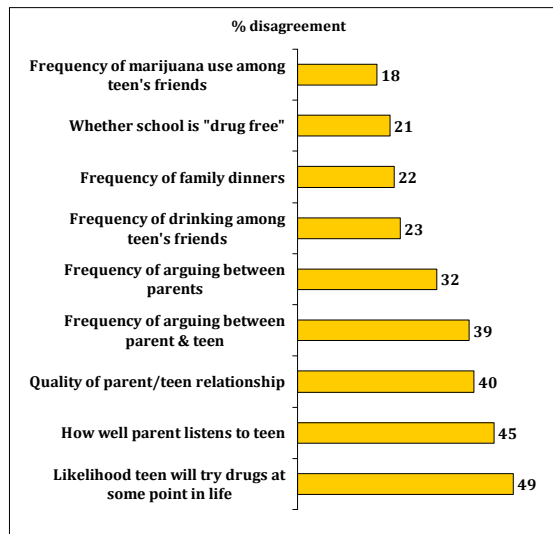
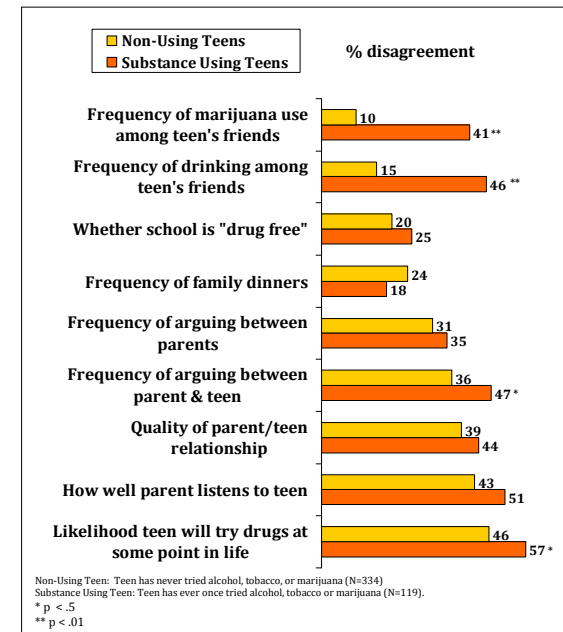


Figure 2 confirms the hypothesis that disagreement between pairs is associated with teen's substance use, particularly disagreement about friends' drinking and marijuana use.

Figure 2: Disagreement in Paired Responses of Teen & Parent, by Teen Use of Substances



Conclusions

Comparing parent and teen responses illuminates the extent to which parents are effectively monitoring their children and are aware of what is happening in their children's lives. Since parental ignorance may be associated with teen use, educating parents about the need to learn whether their child's friends or classmates are engaging in substance use may be a promising prevention measure. Also, since parents' expectations have such a tremendous influence on their teens' substance-use behaviors, prevention programs should encourage parent's expectation that their children will not use drugs.



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For a complete overview of study methodology see: National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XV: Teens and Parents (http://www.casacolumbia.org/templates/publications_reports.aspx)
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