

Parental disapproval contributes to racial, ethnic differences in prescription drug misuse by teens

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Parents' attitudes toward substance use may help to explain observed racial/ethnic variations in prescription drug misuse among teens, reports a study in the May *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, the official journal of the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics.

"Our findings add support to growing evidence that parents continue to remain a vital part of [adolescents'](#) decision-making, particularly regarding potentially risky behaviors," according to the new research by Brigid M. Conn, MA, and Amy K. Marks, PhD, of Suffolk University, Boston.

Parent Disapproval Linked to Lower Rate of Drug Misuse

The researchers analyzed data on prescription [drug misuse](#) from a national survey of more than 18,000 adolescents. "Misuse and abuse of prescription drugs is one of the fastest growing drug epidemics in the United States," the researchers write.

As in previous studies, Caucasian teens had the highest rates of prescription drug misuse. For example, 3.4 percent of Caucasian adolescents misused tranquilizers, compared to 2.9 percent of Hispanic and 0.9 percent of African American youth.

In contrast to previous studies, teens from higher-income families had lower rates of prescription drug misuse. Rates were also higher in older adolescents, and in girls compared to boys.

The teens were also asked about their parents' and peers' [attitudes](#) toward specific types of substance use. Parental disapproval was associated with lower rates of prescription drug misuse—although this effect varied by race/ethnicity. Even though Caucasian teens had the highest rates of prescription drug misuse, those whose parents strongly disapproved of all types of substance use were at lower risk than teens in the two minority groups.

Strong parental disapproval of alcohol use was linked to lower rates of prescription drug misuse in African American teens, while parental disapproval of marijuana use was a stronger factor for Hispanic teens. Dr. Marks comments, "No matter what the ethnic/racial background of the family, parents' disapproving attitudes about misusing [substances](#) in general—whether alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco—play a strong role in protecting their adolescents from misusing prescription medicine."

Step toward Understanding 'Culture-Specific' Factors in Substance Abuse

Caucasian teens whose close friends disapproved of substance use had lower rates of prescription drug misuse, although peer attitudes had little impact for African American or Hispanic teens. Dr. Marks adds, "Parents can also help their adolescents navigate toward friends with shared substance use disapproval attitudes."

The study confirms racial/ethnic variations in substance use by adolescents. It also provides initial evidence that disapproval by "important socialization agents"—especially parents—has a significant

effect on prescription drug misuse.

That result may provide clues as to how the racial/ethnic variations arise. Past studies of substance use in [teens](#) have typically used race as an "explanation" for observed differences.

More recently, researchers are focusing on values and other "culture-specific factors" that may explain risk behaviors, rather than generalizing across groups. "We're already working on new studies to understand some of the unique socializing factors or agents which seem to be protective for Hispanic and African American adolescents, beyond parental disapproval," says Dr Marks.

She adds, "As we learn more about what kinds of socializing messages matter most to which cultural groups, clinicians, teachers, social workers, and [parents](#) alike can help keep steering their adolescents in meaningful ways to make healthy behavioral choices when it comes to [prescription drugs](#)."

Provided by Wolters Kluwer Health

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