



## Effect of appreciation for Indigenous cultures and exposure to racial insults on alcohol and drug use initiation among multiethnic Argentinean youth



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### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 5 January 2016

#### Keywords:

Culture  
Racism  
Substance use  
Youth  
Indigenous  
Latin America

### ABSTRACT

**Objectives.** This study evaluated the effect of factors reflecting appreciation of Indigenous culture and racial insults on alcohol and drug use initiation among multi-ethnic youth in Jujuy, Argentina.

**Methods.** Students were surveyed from 27 secondary schools that were randomly selected to represent the province. A total of 3040 eligible students in 10th grade, age 14 to 18 years were surveyed in 2006 and 2660 of these same students completed surveys in 11th grade in 2007. Multivariate logistic regression models assessed the effect of appreciation for Indigenous cultures and reported exposure to racial insults in 10th grade on incident current alcohol drinking in previous 30 days, binge drinking ( $\geq 5$  drinks at one sitting), and lifetime drug use (marijuana, inhalants or cocaine) in 11th grade among students not reporting these behaviors in 2006.

**Results.** In 2006, 63% of respondents reported high appreciation for Indigenous cultures and 39% had ever experienced racial insults. In 2007, incident current drinking was 24.4%, binge drinking 14.8%, and any drug use initiation was 4.1%. Exposure to racial insults increased the likelihood of binge drinking (OR = 1.6; 95% CI 1.2–2.1) but was not significant for any drug use. Appreciation for Indigenous cultures reduced the risk of any drug use initiation (OR = 0.5, 95% CI 0.3–0.7) but had no effect for alcohol drinking outcomes. These effects were independent of Indigenous ethnicity.

**Conclusions.** Enhancing appreciation for Indigenous cultures and decreasing racial insults are achievable goals that can be incorporated into programs to prevent youth substance use.

Published by Elsevier Inc.

### Introduction

Alcohol and drug use and misuse significantly contribute to the global burden of disease (Ezzati et al., 2004; Rehm and Room, 2005). Alcohol is linked to intentional and unintentional injuries and chronic diseases, and it accounts for about the same amount of the global burden of disability-adjusted life-years as tobacco (Murray and Lopez, 1996). Drug use is linked to suicide, mental health disorders and cognitive impairments (Rehm and Room, 2005; Cairney et al., 2002). Substance use among adolescents merits special attention since this is a vulnerable

period for addiction, and it may lead to social problems such as poor school performance and confronting personal and institutional violence (Crews et al., 2007; Alderete et al., 2008; Pierobon et al., 2013).

Research to understand the psychosocial etiology of adolescent alcohol and drug use has a long history in North America but research in South America is rare. Within this region, Argentina has highest rates of alcohol drinking and cocaine use and shows a rising trend in substance use in general (CICAD, 2011). Between 2001 and 2011 binge drinking increased from 29.7% to 63.4%, marijuana use from 4.6% to 13.9%, inhalants use from 0.9% to 4.5%, and cocaine use from 1.4% to 4.6%. The data indicates that current prevention efforts are insufficient, failing to address the complex phenomena that underlie youth's use of psychotropic substances. An under studied topic in a culturally diverse setting like South America, is the relationship between cultural factors and substance use (Gonzalez Burchard et al., 2005; Organization of American States, 2015; Torres-Parodi and Bolis, 2007; Kam and Cleveland, 2011). The

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province of Jujuy in Northwest Argentina is a unique environment for examining these relationships. The majority of the population is of Indigenous background of Andean and Amazonian ethnic groups, with a minority of European descent and an important segment of mixed-origin individuals (Indigenous and European). In this context a hierarchical social structure persists, with discrimination and racism against Indigenous Peoples (Organization of American States, 2015); (Torres-Parodi and Bolis, 2007). At the same time, contemporary social change processes have fostered revalorization of Indigenous cultures. This is also a border area with intense trafficking of cocaine from contiguous producing countries.

We conducted a longitudinal analysis of how cultural factors influence substance use among youth in a social setting for which there has been little if any research apart from the authors' prior work. We examined the effect of two posited protective and risk factors – appreciation for Indigenous cultures and exposure to racial insults – on alcohol, marijuana, inhalants and cocaine use. This research is relevant in view of increasing consumption rates and the need to design effective prevention programs. It is also grounded in a new social setting for examining the web of substance use causation.

#### *Longitudinal studies of cultural factors and youth substance use*

A number of studies in North America have assessed the relationship between youth substance use and risk and protective cultural factors, using different indicators across ethnic groups of varied socio-historical trajectories and yielding mixed results (Kam and Cleveland, 2011; Whitbeck et al., 2001; Whitbeck et al., 2004; Terrell et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2003; Nasim et al., 2007; German et al., 2009). Few studies have used prospective designs. A prospective study among Mexican heritage adolescents showed that linguistic acculturation was a risk factor for marijuana initiation for boys, was protective for inhalant use initiation, and had no effect on alcohol use (Marsiglia et al., 2011). Another study showed that Latina/o youth experiencing discrimination reported more use on a combined measure of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana (Kam et al., 2010). A study of American Indian adolescents found that perceived discrimination influenced early and problem alcohol drinking (Cheadle and Whitbeck, 2011). In the same population, discrimination was not found to be a predictor of marijuana use (Cheadle and Sittner Hartshorn, 2012). Among Navajo adolescents, discrimination was linked to boys' substance use, using a combined measure of alcohol, marijuana, hallucinogens, stimulants and inhalants. Navajo culture and in some cases, connection to White American culture, buffered the negative effect of discrimination (Galliher et al., 2011). Among African American adolescents, perceived discrimination was associated with an increase in a combined measure of cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol use in adulthood (Brodish et al., 2011). Similarly, early experiences of discrimination among African American adolescents were correlated with a combined measure of alcohol and marijuana use (Gibbons et al., 2004). The literature for Latin American countries is scarce and limited to adults. In Chile among adult primary health care patients, perceived discrimination was correlated with alcohol and illegal drug use (Capezza et al., 2012). A longitudinal study among adults of the Amazonian Tsimane in Bolivia showed that adherence to shared cultural norms was negatively associated with alcohol drinking (Reyes-Garcia et al., 2010).

#### *Cultural appreciation, racism and substance use*

Cultural identity indicates the degree to which individuals perceive to be included in an ethnic group and it has been a central focus of health research (Oetting and Beauvais, 1991; Cokley, 2007; Phinney, 1989). Affiliation to a cultural group however, does not imply that an individual holds a positive affect towards the group. At the cognitive and emotional levels, a range of positive or negative appraisals may emerge as individuals ascribe significance, meaning and value to a culture

(Sellers et al., 1998; Epple and Thubauville, 2012) (Morgan, 2003). A positive appraisal of one's culture is thought to contribute to well-being by conferring feelings of self-worth, connectedness, and purpose (Kiang et al., 2006), and there is indication that in educational settings, promoting a positive appraisal for the culture of others improves the learning environment. We hypothesized that appreciation for historically undervalued Indigenous cultures will be protective across ethnic groups in a multicultural context. To the contrary, we hypothesized that exposure to racial insults will have a negative effect across ethnic groups. In previous analyses, exposure to racial insults referring to Indigenous stereotype characteristics was reported by all ethnic groups in this research site. (Alderete et al., 2012) Racism refers to an organized system that assigns hierarchical status to specific groups and uses this ranking to preferentially allocate societal goods and resources to those who are regarded as inherently superior. Stress elicited by exposure to racial insults, even if the receptor does not identify with the posited group, may induce or contribute to alcohol or drug use as a coping strategy (Gerrard et al., 2012).

The ecological public health model (Green et al., 1996) provides an overall framework for model building in this study. It is understood that substance use behavior is influenced by a wide array of individual, interpersonal and contextual variables. The social norms (Berkowitz, 2003) and tension reduction theories (Goldman et al., 1999; Greely and Oei, 1999) are used to posit plausible explanations of the relations found among variables.

## **Methods**

### *Sampling and study procedures*

The study was conducted between 2006 and 2007 in the Province of Jujuy, in Northwest Argentina. Procedures were described in a previous publication (Alderete et al., 2009). The 27 participating schools included 3690 8th grade students age 12 to 16 in 2004. Surveys were self-administered in class and students who were not located in the school at follow-up were surveyed at home. For this report we used data from the 3040 students between ages 14 and 18 years who completed surveys in 2006. In 2007, 2660 of 3040 students (87.5% response rate) completed surveys at time 2 for the one-year cohort. The UCSF Committee on Human Research and an NIH-certified human subjects research board in Buenos Aires based at *Centro de Educación Médica e Investigaciones Clínicas* (CEMIC) approved the research protocol. Passive consent was requested from caretakers and students signed an active consent. The questionnaire consisted of translated items from surveys of adolescents in the U.S. (Fryar et al., 2009; MMWR, 1992), and questions developed through qualitative research in the target population (Alderete et al., 2012; Alderete et al., 2010).

### *Exposure variables: appreciation for indigenous cultures and racial insults*

The variable assessing appreciation for Indigenous cultures was developed through in depth qualitative interviews and was measured with the following items: 1) "It is important to teach children about traditions like *Pachamama* or *Pin Pin*"; 2) "It is important to continue with the traditions and customs of the elders"; and 3) "It is important to learn traditional languages like Quechua, Aymara, Guarani". The items have a disagreement-agreement response set with a range of 1 to 5. For this analysis we converted to a binary indicator of high versus low appreciation (3.6 to 5 vs. 1 to 3.5, respectfully).

Questions on experiences of racial insults were also developed through qualitative research (Alderete et al., 2012). We created two items to assess whether respondents had ever been called any of the following names in a way that was intended to insult or to bother them: 1) "*coya tonto*", "*chaguanco*", or "*indio cabeza dura*"; or 2) "*boliviano or bolita*". The items were assessed with a Yes or No response and we constructed a binary variable indicating ever versus never being exposed to one of these two sets racial insults.

### *Demographics and family characteristics*

Respondents reported their sex, age, religion, and school attendance. They selected their ethnic identity from the following list: Indigenous, mixed Indigenous and European, and European (Alderete et al., 2009). A few respondents

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