



Factors associated with American Indian and white adolescent drug selling in rural communities

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Abstract

Relatively few studies have examined the correlates of adolescent drug selling in America, with most of these studies focusing on urban settings. The present study examines the risk and protective factors associated with drug selling among American Indian and white adolescents residing in a rural North-western state in the United States. Using survey data collected in 2010–2012, we conduct logistic regression analyses exploring the correlates of drug selling ($n = 568$). Generally, we found support for prior explanations of drug selling, but identified some important race-specific differences. Specifically, we found that stress exposure was a risk factor for American Indians, but not whites. Conversely, academic achievement served as a protective factor for white adolescents but not American Indians. Our findings suggest that the race gap in rural drug selling can be explained by considering differences in social bonds, stress exposure, and exposure to substance using family and friends.

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1. Introduction

Prior research has established that American Indian (AI) adolescents are disproportionately at risk for various substance use behaviors, relative to the general population (e.g., [Plunkett and](#)

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Mitchell, 2000; Office of Applied Studies, 2007; Beauvais et al., 2008; Wood, 2009). While a number of studies have revealed that American Indian adolescents are at a heightened risk of earlier onset of substance use, drug use beyond marijuana, and alcohol/substance abuse/dependence (Costello et al., 1997; Plunkett and Mitchell, 2000; Office of Applied Studies, 2007), there has been little empirical research that has explored the risk and protective factors associated with drug selling among AI adolescents. Indeed, there have been relatively few studies that have examined the factors that are associated with drug selling among adolescents that reside in rural America generally. Rural communities, particularly those in sparsely populated and geographically isolated areas, may offer smaller markets but also less competition than urban communities (Steinman, 2005; Frith and McElwee, 2007). The social and economic consequences of drug selling include not only the productivity and health costs of drug use, but also the social cost to communities of having increased numbers of residents in prison and under criminal justice supervision (Rhodes, 2009). These costs may be particularly devastating in minority communities where arrest for drug use or selling, often the arrest of young adult males, are more common (Iguchi, 2002; Sanders et al., 2013). Our research questions are derived from three explanations of drug selling proposed by Steinman (2005), social bonding, social networks supporting drug use, and purposeful business activity and an exposure to stress explanation derived from Agnew's (1992) general strain theory. We explore whether social bonds to parents and school, substance using family and peers, and stress affect adolescent drug selling. We also explore whether there are racial differences in the association between these factors and drug selling. In this study, we extend prior research into the correlates of drug selling by using data collected from a study of rural non-Hispanic and AI youth in a rural Northwestern state in the United States. In order to properly situate our research, we first examine the key explanations and the correlates of adolescent drug selling, as well as the cumulative evidence supporting such explanations/correlates. Since most of this research has been conducted in urban settings, we examine the rural setting for drug selling. Finally, we explore the problem of drugs among AIs, and discuss the reasons why exploring the correlates of AI drug selling and the race gap between white and AI teen drug selling is important.

1.1. Background

While the problem of adolescent illicit drug use/misuse/abuse has produced voluminous research exploring virtually every aspect surrounding the phenomenon, the risk and protective factors associated with adolescents who sell illicit drugs have been relatively understudied. Indeed, some have characterized the problem of adolescent drug dealing as “practically ignored” by scholars (Centers and Weist, 1998; p. 396). While this may be an overstatement, we found few studies that have explored the antecedents of adolescent drug selling. The extant studies have been illuminating in identifying some of the important correlates of drug dealing, however. One such correlate is drug use—a number of studies have found that drug use is a significant predictor of drug selling (e.g., Inciardi, 1990; Li and Feigelman, 1994; Schensul et al., 1998; Steinman, 2005; Felson et al., 2012). In fact, since selling drugs is so strongly correlated with drug use, many of the risk and protective factors associated with use are also presumed to be predictive of selling.

Beyond drug use, there are other factors that have been identified as correlates of drug selling. Steinman (2005) suggests three key explanations for explaining adolescent drug selling: social bonding, social networks supporting drug use, and purposeful business activity (p. 71.e2). *Social bonding* explanations focus on the role that integration, commitment, and

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