

How Urban Youth Perceive Relationships Among School Environments, Social Networks, Self-Concept, and Substance Use

Rebecca N. Dudovitz, MD, MS; Giselle Perez-Aguilar, BA; Grace Kim, BS; Mitchell D. Wong, MD, PhD; Paul J. Chung, MD, MS

From the Department of Pediatrics/Children's Discovery & Innovation Institute, University of California–Los Angeles (Dr Dudovitz, Ms Perez-Aguilar, and Dr Chung), David Geffen School of Medicine (Dr Dudovitz, Ms Kim, Dr Wong, and Dr Chung), Department of Internal Medicine, General Internal Medicine & Health Services Research (Dr Wong), Department of Health Policy and Management, Fielding School of Public Health (Dr Chung), UCLA, Los Angeles, Calif; and RAND, Santa Monica, Calif (Dr Chung)

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Address correspondence to Rebecca N. Dudovitz, MD, MS, Department of Pediatrics, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, 10833 Le Conte Ave, 12-358 CHS, Los Angeles, CA 90095 (e-mail: rdudovitz@mednet.ucla.edu).

Received for publication April 8, 2016; accepted October 7, 2016.

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: Studies suggest adolescent substance use aligns with academic and behavioral self-concept (whether teens think of themselves as good or bad students and as rule followers or rule breakers) as well as peer and adult social networks. Schools are an important context in which self-concept and social networks develop, but it remains unclear how school environments might be leveraged to promote healthy development and prevent substance use. We sought to describe how youth perceive the relationships among school environments, adolescent self-concept, social networks, and substance use.

METHODS: Semistructured interviews with 32 low-income minority youth (aged 17–22 years) who participated in a prior study, explored self-concept development, school environments, social networks, and substance use decisions. Recruitment was stratified by whether, during high school, they had healthy or unhealthy self-concept profiles and had engaged in or abstained from substance use.

RESULTS: Youth described feeling labeled by peers and teachers and how these labels became incorporated into their self-

concept. Teachers who made students feel noticed (eg, by learning students' names) and had high academic expectations reinforced healthy self-concepts. Academic tracking, extracurricular activities, and school norms determined potential friendship networks, grouping students either with well-behaving or misbehaving peers. Youth described peer groups, combined with their self-concept, shaping their substance use decisions. Affirming healthy aspects of their self-concept at key risk behavior decision points helped youth avoid substance use in the face of peer pressure.

CONCLUSIONS: Youth narratives suggest school environments shape adolescent self-concept and adult and peer social networks, all of which impact substance use.

KEYWORDS: qualitative research; schools; social networks; self concept; substance use; youth

ACADEMIC PEDIATRICS 2017;17:161–167

WHAT'S NEW

Qualitative interviews with low-income, minority youth suggest modifiable aspects of the school environment contribute to substance use through adolescents' adult and peer social networks and self-concept development. Results suggest the school environment itself might be targeted for substance use prevention.

A GROWING BODY of evidence indicates that school environments, including its organizational structure, ethos, educational instruction, and behavioral instruction,^{1–3} may have a strong influence on adolescent substance use.^{1,2,4,5} However, the exact causal mechanisms through which schools might influence substance use remain unknown. Through near-daily exposure, school environments have the potential to shape adolescents'

relationships with teachers and peers, social norms, self-concept, and educational attainment.¹ These factors are likely to be mutually reinforcing and are strongly associated with substance use.^{6,7} However, developing interventions to reduce substance use by harnessing school environments requires a deeper understanding of the pathways through which school environments, social networks and self-concept might be related.

Social influence theory⁸ suggests that adolescent substance use is closely tied to the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in their social network.^{9–11} Schools have the potential to shape social connections with adults and peers, as well as social norms around problem behaviors.^{12,13} Hence social networks represent one key mechanism through which school environments might impact substance use.¹⁴ Further, as teens age, they develop and solidify their self-concept, or self-perceived

competency in different domains,¹⁵ based on their experiences and the input of people close to them.^{15–17} Previous studies show that the self-concept domains of behavioral conduct and academic competence (whether teens think of themselves as rule followers or rule breakers and as good or bad students) are strongly associated with substance use and may be shaped through adolescents' experiences in school.^{18–22} Complicating this area, interviews with teachers and adolescents in the United Kingdom suggest that schools may impact self-concept, in part, through exposure to risky peers.²³ Alternatively, cross-sectional evidence from the United States suggests supportive relationships with school-related adults are associated with healthier self-concepts and lower rates of substance use.²⁴ Finally, it is possible that school-level factors are merely a marker for other contextual factors that drive substance use, such as family stress, parenting style, and exposure to violence and poverty.²⁵

Understanding whether and how schools might play an active role in shaping adolescent substance use is critical to designing effective prevention strategies and helping clinicians identify and support youth at high risk for substance use. However, few studies describe the processes through which school environments relate to substance use. Specifically, there is a paucity of qualitative studies describing how adolescents' experiences in US schools relate to their social network, and how that might influence students' academic and behavioral self-concept development and substance use decisions. Understanding how adolescents perceive school pathways toward substance use can elucidate targets for prevention and describe potential health impacts of school-related policies and practices. This may be particularly important for low-income minority youth, who are at increased risk for poor academic and health outcomes, including substance use, and whose perspectives are critical to include in the scientific discourse regarding health promotion. Hence, through the use of qualitative methods, we sought to describe how low-income minority youth perceive the relationships among school environments, social networks, self-concept, and substance use.

METHODS

We performed semistructured interviews with 32 youth aged 17 to 22 years (conducted from May 2014 to April 2015) about their school environments, self-concept development, social networks, and substance use decisions. All youth had previously participated 3 years prior in the RISE study (Reducing health Inequities through Social & Educational change), a cross-sectional survey of 9th–12th grade students who had applied for admission to high-performing charter schools in low-income Los Angeles communities.²⁶ All procedures were approved by the institutional review board of the University of California Los Angeles.

PARTICIPANTS

Based on RISE survey responses, we recruited male and female participants who attended charter, public, or alter-

native schools to explore youth perspectives across a range of different school environments (Table). To explore the relationship between self-concept and substance use, we recruited participants who reported high and low behavioral self-concepts and engaging in and abstaining from substance use. The RISE survey measures included the frequency of 30-day alcohol use, marijuana use, and other drug use and the Harter Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents Behavioral Conduct Subscale.²⁷ This 5-item subscale ($\alpha = 0.69$) asks respondents to select from 2 opposing statements, the one that describes them best and the degree to which it is true for them. For example, respondents indicate whether they are a teenager who usually does the right thing or one who often doesn't do what they know is right. Youth with behavioral self-concept scores at or above the 75th percentile (which corresponds to identifying as a rule follower) were considered to have had high behavioral self-concept at the time they were attending high school. Conversely, those scoring at or below the 25th percentile (which corresponds to identifying as a rule breaker) were categorized as having low behavioral self-concept. Those who reported using at least 2 substances in the previous 30 days were considered substance users at the time of high school while abstainers reported no substance use in the 30 days before the RISE survey. The majority of RISE participants had concordant self-concept and substance use profiles. Among participants with low behavioral self-concept 52.7% used alcohol, 38.9% used marijuana, and 35.3% used more than one substance in the prior 30 days, while 21.4% reported no lifetime substance use; among participants with high behavioral self-concept 22.3% used alcohol, 7.8% used marijuana, and 5.2% used more than one substance in the prior 30 days, while 48.9% reported no lifetime substance use. To explore the relationships among school environments, social

Table. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Number/Mean	Percent/Range
Age at interview, y	20	17–22
Gender		
Male	13	41
Female	19	59
Race/ethnicity		
Latino	29	91
Black	2	6
Multiethnic/multiracial	1	3
School type		
Charter	15	47
Public	16	50
Alternative	1	3
Self-concept		
High risk	15	47
Low risk	17	53
Substance use		
Yes	23	72
No	9	28
Grade at RISE survey		
9th	5	16
10th	7	22
11th	9	28
12th	11	34

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5717046>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5717046>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)