PSYCHOSOCIAL CORRELATES OF SUBSTANCE USE: COMPARING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH INCARCERATED OFFENDERS IN HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

Drug use prevalence data were obtained from 969 adolescents, high school students and imprisoned offenders who reported use of cough medicine, organic solvents, cannabis, heroin, tranquilizers, and narcotics over the past six months. Incarcerated youths, in particular girls, had higher prevalence rates than students. Drug use frequencies were associated with psychosocial variables such as disinhibition, peer drug use, susceptibility to peer pressure, attitudes, encouragement by peers, and perceived availability of drugs. The psychosocial process of the initiation and maintenance of substance use was specified as a path model that considered 1) personality and social environment as distal precursors and 2) a drug-use predisposition and perceived availability as proximal precursors of three kinds of outcome variables: drug use, the intention to try illicit drugs if they were legal, and adverse outcomes of drug use. It was found that the same structural equation model fit the data of both samples of offenders and students, however, with very different weights assigned to the paths.

The use of illicit drugs among adolescents is a world-wide issue, and many studies have tried to shed more light on the psychological causes and effects of this problem behavior [1-6]. The present research contributes to this evidence by providing data from a particular subsample in Hong Kong, namely incarcerated delinquents. Moreover, an attempt is made to explore the interplay of various...