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The Effect of Substance Abuse on the Parent/Child Relationship

I. Abstract

Research has shown that parent substance abuse is a predominate risk factor associated with the quality of their relationship with a child. The quality of the relationship can protect the well-being of the child, and the usage of drugs. Actions of neglect and indifference can lead to the usage and abuse of drugs in a child (Baylor 2019). There have been specific studies on child neglect and substance use in specific communities, but no study has shown the direct correlation between substance abuse in the parent and child, and the effect on that relationship.

In 2014, child welfare administrative data from the United States indicated that at least 26% of identified victims and 8% of non-victims of neglect were reported to be living with a caregiver who was abusing drugs (Fine 1985). Children raised in families with parental substance misuse often face problems early in that child's developments that can be correlated to the quality of the relationship (Barlow 2018). There has been little recent research on the effect of the parent-child relationship on the substance abuse of the child, as well as the parent.

The purpose of this study is to see whether or not there is a correlation between the quality parent-child relationship and the abuse of substances by the student, as well as by the parent. This study will also examine what relationship factors and expectations between parents and high school students influence substance abuse, and whether or not support and communication reduce that likelihood.

II. Introduction:

a. Review of Literature

As an adolescent, there is a need to go out of your comfort zone and take risks, especially risks that are seen around you, and have become a part of the social norm. As the brain continues to mature during puberty, the want to do alcohol and drugs becomes more apparent. The age of experimentation has decreased throughout the years and can only negatively impact them later in the future. (Fine 1985) The usage of alcohol continues to be a consistent problem starting from preadolescence into young adulthood. Recent studies have showed that alcohol has negative effects on the adolescent brain and will negatively impact the development and call attention to prevent and reduce underage drinking. (Paris 2015) Data from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Study showed that the prevalence of both lifetime alcohol dependence and alcohol abuse show a significant decline as the age increases. (Luk 2010) Adolescents that are 12 and younger were seen to have a prevalence of lifetime alcohol dependence at 40.6%, whereas adolescents that are 18 years old were at 16.6% and at 21 years was 10.6%. The contribution of age at alcohol use initiation to the odds of lifetime dependence and abuse varied little across gender and racial subgroups in the study. (Knight 2010) The usage of substances can heavily impact the relationship between the parent and the child. Previous studies have shown that the increased likelihood of substance abuse seen from the child is more likely to have a negative

impact on the relationship they have with their parents. Many parents believe that the quality of the time they spend with their children is dependent on whether or not the child is using substances. (Martikainen 2018) If looking into specific gender factors, studies have shown that substance use prevention programs are not sensitive towards the specific necessities of a female. As a result of that study, gender specified programs, so females are able to focus on family bonding, communication, supervision, and also looking at the impact substances have on body image, depression, social assertiveness. (Ledoux 2002)

Studies showed that the increased parental control and parental emotional support were more likely to impact the use of substances in girls more than boys. Another study showed that the effect of growth overtime in parent alcohol use on growth in children's and tendencies alcohol was mediated by parental monitoring in girls only and it showed the importance of gender in the Association between parent child communication and adolescent substance use (McGillicuddy 2018). Many studies that look at the connection between the parent child communication and substance use mostly focused on cigarette smoking or alcohol drinking and the impact it has on adolescence, but as popular as nicotine has become in this generation, this study tended to focus heavily more on that instead of the other factors like cigarette smoking, marijuana, and alcohol. Not many studies have included nicotine in their research, and it is very important to consider that a major factor considering how prevalent and it is within this generation (Morton 2013).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: Is there a potential trend between the parent-child relationship (or lack thereof) and the influence of substances on the student, and if so, what factors are more significant than others?

Research Question 2: Is there also a potential trend between the substance abuse performed by the parent and whether it has an impact on the relationship with the child?

Research Question 3: Does a negative relationship between parents and high school students influence substance use?

Research Question 4: What relationship factors between parents and high school students influence substance use?

Research Question 5: Does parental support and communication reduce the likelihood of substance abuse in high school students?

Hypotheses:

H₁: Students who spend less quality time with their parents use substances at higher rates than students who spend more quality time with their parents.

H₂: Students that use substances are more likely to have poor relationships with their parents than students that do not use substances.

III. Methods:

a. Participants

This study was conducted in an upper socioeconomic suburban high school in Westchester County. Students from freshmen to seniors were asked to participate in an online questionnaire that was sent via email after a consent form was signed. All responses from the questionnaire were kept anonymous, and the entire high school was sent the email invitation, thus eliminating any racial or gender bias that could have occurred. The initial email that was sent out to all the students in the high school, described the study as well as the possible risks and benefits from participations. Attached to that email was an online consent form, which was to be filled out by both the parent and the student and submitted on Microsoft Forms. The school psychologist also offered to have her email attached in the invitation if any feelings of discomfort started while taking the survey.

b. Risk to Participants

A potential risk to participants during the experiment might be a feeling of discomfort caused by questions about their relationship with their parent or their student. Stating that the participant has used drugs and alcohol could be uncomfortable as well. It is also possible that participation in this survey might trigger substance abuse in some participants. The risk is minimal, but it is not absent. If any uncomfortable feelings occur, the participants will be given the contact information of the school psychiatrist and/or will be able to remove themselves from the questionnaire at any time. Students will remain 100% anonymous. Some vulnerable populations that will be included in the survey are minors and incidentally anyone with mental, psychiatric, or emotional disabilities.

c. Possible Benefits of Study

Benefits to this study can be more knowledge about the social aspect of high school, and the relative effect it has on students, their academics, as well as their relationship with their parents. This can allow for better counselling at school as well as more informational sessions about the impact of substances to make kids aware. This study can also be beneficial to the parents in order for their child to understand the impact substances have on their relationship.

IV. Results

- a. Due to the global pandemic and the severity of the topic, it was difficult to find many participants. There were 32 people that signed the consent form, and 8 out of those 32 participated in the survey. Because they remain anonymous there is no way to know the grade each participant was in. An example of the types of questions in the questionnaire that was given to the participants is shown in Figure 1.1, with a depiction of their responses displayed in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.1: An example of the format and questions that were given to the participants

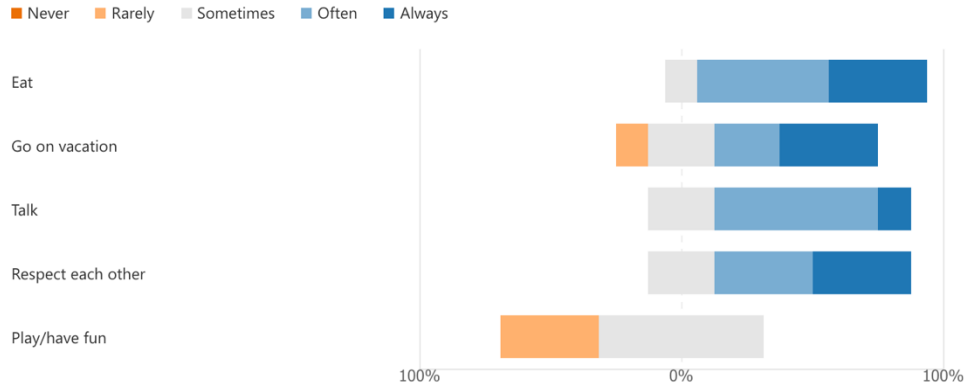
1. How often do you and your parent/guardian do these things together?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Eat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Go on vacation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respect each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Play/have fun	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 1.2: Participants responses, as graphed by Microsoft Forms

1. How often do you and your parent/guardian do these things together?

[More Details](#)



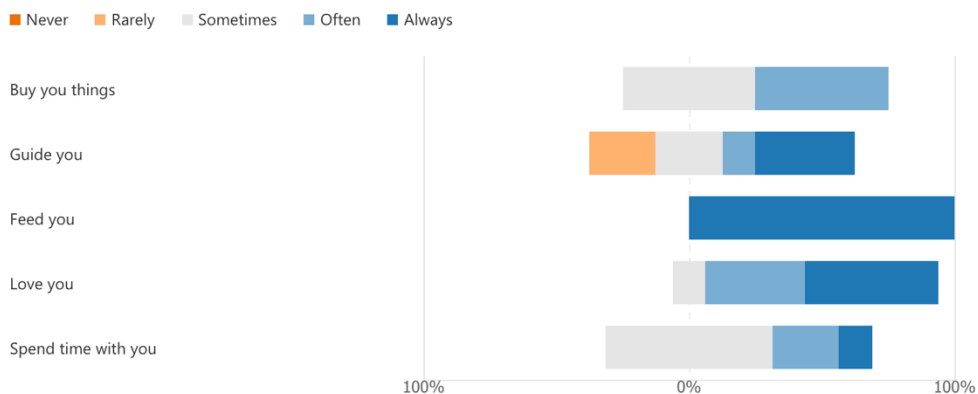
V. Discussion

The results found in this study did support both hypotheses that substance use of the student does have a negative impact on the relationship they have with their parents. Although the study showed that most students do regularly do things like eat, talk, go on vacation, etc. with their parents, there is a certain gap that is there once the child starts to use substances. One question asked the participant to state one rule that parents and teens should have about the way they act or behave with each other. The responses varied from communication, honesty, and that respect should go both ways. Data from this survey shows that students who use drugs and alcohol have a harder time opening up to their parents, therefore leading to a breach in their relationship. Figure 2.1 shows the results after asking about specific things a parent does for a child.

Figure 2.1

2. How often does your parent/guardian do these things for you?

[More Details](#)



The 25% of the group that picked rarely for “guide you,” also picked sometimes for having fun with their parents and spending time with their parents. Both participants did not state that they use alcohol or drugs. Although this doesn’t create a link between parents that guide their kids and kids who use substance, there is another connection. This does show a connection that parents who don’t spend much quality time with their children, can negatively affect the child, and their relationship.

VI. Limitations

Due to the severity of this topic, and the triggers it can cause when addressed, there were many limitations while conducting this experiment. Trying to find participants to do a survey about drugs and alcohol is difficult enough, but to add the concept of the parent/child relationship made the group limited. Although there were 31 participants that signed the consent, only 25% of the group took the survey. This made it very difficult to calculate results. There were little results because although

there was a big emphasis on it being anonymous, maybe it made people feel uncomfortable sharing this private information to another student. 1 out of 8 said yes to using alcohol but could not state how it impacted her relationship with her parents, therefore it was difficult to come to a conclusion. With a larger sample size, and reaching out to other schools, the data would have value, and it wouldn't be difficult to come to a conclusion. After reading many articles about this specific topic, it has helped when dissecting the data.

VII. Work Cited

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