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Adolscent Substance and Alcohol Use in St. Petersburg, Florida

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy

Social Change Portfolio

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OVERVIEW

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Adolescent Substance and Alcohol Use in St. Petersburg, Florida

Goal Statement: The goal of this prevention program is to reduce the rate of adolescent use and abuse of drugs and alcohol in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Significant Findings: Rates of excessive drinking are higher in St. Petersburg than the state, and the vibrant night life lends itself to that lifestyle (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps). It is important to address adolescent substance use and abuse, as approximately 15% of the adolescent population have used illicit drugs (High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020). Experimentation with substance use is associated with a litany of potential consequences including addiction, loss of life, and mental and physical health consequences. Adolescents are vulnerable to substance use and abuse, in part, because their brain is still developing (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Adolescents can face a variety of factors that incline them to cope with substance use, including peer pressure, lack of acceptance for LGBTQ status, and a narrative perpetuated by the media wherein substance exploration is viewed as a form of identity exploration (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Ultimately, the decision to use substances is based on intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, and action must be taken.

Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps: Successful prevention efforts should entail a multifaceted and dynamic approach from counselors to strengthen protective factors, while mitigating risk factors. It is important to partner with local schools to connect with the local adolescents and their families. Specific steps could include addressing the students at the local middle and high schools to promote a healthy lifestyle that includes abstaining from substance

use. Psychoeducation can be incorporated to train the adolescents in how to resist peer pressure, as well as how to communicate with parents about the temptation. Through the local school's PTA, a counselor can connect with parents and guardians of the youths to offer communication training and inform the guardians of the potential dangers of adolescent substance use and the level of influence that they have. The "They hear you" campaign could be introduced to the families of the adolescents to reinforce the belief that children listen to their families (SAMHSA). To address those adolescents in the community who are currently suffering from a substance use disorder, a counselor could make the community aware of resources, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, to facilitate sobriety through a presentation at local schools. It is important to address substance use at an interpersonal and intrapersonal level.

INTRODUCTION

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Addiction is an insidious disease that can impact individuals in their most vulnerable times, although it often does not garner the compassion that other chronic diseases often do despite the comparable genetic components (NIH Drug abuse and addiction). The phenomena of choice appearing more relevant may contribute to one's lack of compassion. However, if someone is battling cancer, one is likely to be sympathetic to that individual, despite cancer being approximately 70% preventable (powerful possibilities). Considering that DNA is only one of multiple factors in the development of addiction, one may recognize the role advocacy can play in their community to prevent substance abuse (NIH Drug abuse and addiction). Populations such as adolescents can be vulnerable in their formative years to engage in substance use to cope with stress associated with that time of life. Saint Petersburg, Florida is a beautiful and diverse

city with a robust night life. That being said, the city, with its accessible night life, can lend itself to drinking or substance use. Excessive drinking rates in Pinellas county are at 24%, with the state rating being 20% (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps). The following paper will address a plan for prevention of substance use and excessive drinking as a coping strategy for adolescents in Saint Petersburg.

PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

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The target problem addressed in this paper is substance abuse by adolescents in Saint Petersburg, Florida. There are a litany of stresses an adolescent may face that may prompt a maladaptive coping strategy like excessive drinking or substance abuse. Risk factors include mental health issues, child abuse, poor school performance, sexual orientation or gender identity associated rejection, family history of substance abuse, or parental neglect (High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020). It is important to engage in preventative measures as a high rate of adults with substance abuse disorders explored substances in their youth. Therefore, addiction is a potential consequence of adolescent drug and alcohol use. Further potential consequences include impairments to physical and mental health, criminal justice involvement, school dropout, and even loss of life. Mental health issues that can arise or worsen include anxiety and depression, or other issues (Alcohol and Substance Use). Adolescents are already prone to risky behavior, and alcohol or substance use can degrade decision making ability resulting in dangerous behavior.

Research indicates that 15% of the highschool population reports to have used illicit drugs, while 14% report to have abused opioids (High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020). The

drug overdose mortality rates in Saint Petersburg are 38 for White individuals, 21 for Black individuals, and 19 for Hispanic individuals, leading to an average of 32 (County Health Rankings & Roadmaps). This compares to the rate of the state of 24 for drug overdose mortality rates, and top U.S. performer of 11. Excessive drinking is rated at 24% in Saint Petersburg, while the rate of the state is 20%. Nationwide, injection drug use (IDU) is increasing among the adolescent population (Brighthaupt et al., 2019).

An dynamic intervention in the community addressing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community factors could provide the catalyst for change. The issue of adolescent alcohol and substance abuse in the community is a complex issue that could benefit from an evidence based intervention. The adolescent population may be vulnerable to exploration of substance use, but through reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors, prevention may be able to be achieved (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019).

PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

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The social-ecological model provides a framework with which to view the myriad of factors that inform a behavior such as substance abuse within adolescents (The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention). Social-ecological theory encompasses factors related to the individual, relationships, community and society that merge within an individual to inform behavior. These components of influence can be further broken down into risk and protective factors. Impactful prevention strengthens protective factors and minimizes risk factors (SAMHSA). This section of the paper will convey the complex interactions that can occur in individuals who are vulnerable to substance abuse in adolescence and beyond.

The first influencing factor in adopting substance use as a behavior pattern is the individual on a biological level (The social-ecological model, Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). For instance, the adolescent may have a genetic predisposition to a substance use disorder. This is also referred to as an addictive personality. Prenatal exposure to alcohol can also increase the likelihood of addiction (SAMHSA). An inclination to explore substance use in adolescence could be related to the development of the brain. The limbic system which holds the reward center of the brain develops prior to the frontal lobe which is responsible for decision making such as behavioral inhibition (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). This may leave an adolescent vulnerable to pursuit of the pleasant neurochemical response related to substances. Overall, lower levels of self-control are associated with substance abuse, while greater self-control and positive self-image are protective factors (Lee et al., 2020, SAMHSA). Gender also appears to play a role in substance use, as males engage in substance use more than females (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Stressful life events such as death of a loved one, or parental divorce can lead to anxiety, depression, or PTSD (Swearer et al., 2015). Coping with such difficulties can increase the likelihood that an adolescent will explore substance use. Therefore, resilience to mental health issues is a protective factor. Making such a decision can be influenced by age as well, as younger individuals are less likely to assess excessive drinking or substance abuse as harmful (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults).

Substance use and abuse in adolescence is also related to their relationships. Peer relationships grow in importance in adolescence, and they can be an influencing factor for substance exploration (The social-ecological model; High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020; Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Peer pressure to try substances can be

overwhelming relative to potential adult encouragement to abstain from substances. Bullying in the school setting is a difficult experience to endure with an abundance of psychological consequences including an increased likelihood to cope by using substances (Swearer et al., 2015). The view that the family of origin takes regarding alcohol and substance use can be impactful as a protective measure or a risk factor (The social-ecological model; High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020). Parenting style that is laissez faire, or rejecting of LGBTQ status is a risk factor for substance abuse. Therefore, while peer relationships can be at their most influential during adolescence, effective parenting can provide a protective factor against substance use (SAMHSA). Child abuse by a parent, or a parent struggling with mental illness is a risk factor for substance abuse.

Community plays a role in substance use and abuse as well. School takes up a large portion of time for the typical adolescent. Involvement in extra curricular activities such as sports or student government can bolster an adolescents connection with their school. Fostering a connection with the school provides a protective factor against substance use, as does high achievement with grades (High-Risk Substance Use in Youth, 2020). The place that an adolescent grows up plays a role in addiction with rural areas being more vulnerable to substance use (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Research indicates that spirituality or church attendance provides a protective factor against substance use. Additional community factors that protect against substance abuse include employment and college enrollment.

The last feature addressed in the social-ecological model is society. Society has an overarching impact on individuals behavior, including substance use. Laws provide a protective factor, as it is criminalized to sell alcohol to minors. Legalization of recreational or medical marijuana, on the other hand, is a risk factor as it relates to adolescent substance use, because

makes accessibility of this substance more prevalent. Culture can be a risk factor in the United States, with exploration of alcohol and substances during adolescence being glamorized as a rite of passage and a part of identity exploration (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults).

PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

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Theories of prevention play an important role in the effort to mitigate substance use and abuse in adolescents. Effective public health programs help to reduce such risky behavior and manage conditions related to chronic illness like addiction (National career institute, 2005). The most effective interventions incorporate a multifaceted approach attending to individual, organizational, and community aspects. Programs benefit from an understanding of environmental context and behavior based on evidence. A theory of prevention entails analysis and concise explanation of concepts and relationships between variables.

The ecological perspective impresses 2 essential points: behavior affects and is affected by multiple factors; and behavior at the individual level shapes and is shaped by social environment (National career institute, 2005). Interventions that effectively prompt behavior change recognize the complexity of influences such as intrapersonal and interpersonal influences, as well as influences from the community. Intrapersonal level influences can be factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and personality characteristics. Interpersonal level influences can be influences such as family and friends, or individuals one interacts with. Theories that address intrapersonal and interpersonal issues can be classified as “cognitive-behavioral”. Community level influences can be rules or policies or societal norms.

The theory of planned behavior could be particularly relevant to adolescents vulnerable to substance use. To that point, this theory of prevention analyzes behavior as it relates to beliefs, attitudes, and intentions (National career institute, 2005). This theory posits that intentions are pivotal in predicting and influencing behavior. Intentions can be influenced by attitudes towards a particular behavior and interpersonal factors like perceived approval of one's social circle and the community at large. A reason I believe this theory would be valuable for the adolescent population is because it relates to the probability that an individual will engage in a behavior and it recognizes the processes that occur intrapersonally like beliefs. If an adolescent believes that they are invulnerable to addiction, they might have a behavioral intention that is associated with risk taking like exploring substances. The concept of attitude is important, as perspective about the repercussions and benefits will inform behavior. If an adolescent believes that they will enjoy substances without consequences, they will be more vulnerable to engaging in substance use. The subjective norm is also a consequential component of this theory of prevention. This construct points to the perspective of approval and disapproval of others. If an adolescent believes they will be more popular or accepted if they engage in substance use, they may be more vulnerable to that behavior. On the other hand, if an adolescent believes they will be rejected by peers for taking up smoking cigarettes, they will be less likely to adopt the behavior. The last concept addressed in this theory of prevention is perceived behavioral control or the belief of whether the behavior is up to the individual or outside factors. This is important to note if an adolescent believes it is inevitable that they will succumb to alcohol and substance use. This theory is compatible for the prevention of adolescent substance abuse because of the manner with which it addresses cognitive components such as attitudes and beliefs as they relate to substance use.

An existing evidence-based program that has proven to be effective to minimize adolescent substance and alcohol use is the “Creating Lasting Family Connections” program (Promising Practices Network, 2014). This is a family based program that aims to reduce the rates of teenagers using alcohol and substances. This program deals with high risk adolescents aged 12 to 14 and guardians simultaneously, focusing on substance abuse education and communication. Participants in this intervention study were 16% black and the rest were white; 30% of participants were low to middle income and the rest were from high income families. The evaluation method incorporated an experimental and a control group with a program that lasted 6 to 7 months. Results of the study indicated that parent to child communication improved, parents involved the children in establishing rules relating to alcohol and substance use, and substance and alcohol use was postponed by adolescents and reduced by adults. The program was initially implemented by church groups, but has since been replicated by a variety of facilities in 40 states. The curriculum covered education on substance abuse issues and how to implement expectations and consequences. Another component was communications training for adolescents and adults. This program was rated as promising.

PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Risk and protective factors may manifest in different manners within and between different subpopulations (Reese et al., 2007). With that being said, disparities in health and well-being among minority populations merit efforts to understand, rectify, and engage in specialized prevention. A minority population particularly vulnerable to substance use and abuse among

adolescents are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youths (Jordan, 2000). LGBTQ adolescents engage in substance use and abuse at higher rates than the general population of adolescents. This prevalence of drug and alcohol use among this community may be related to marginalization and stigmatization of the LGBTQ individuals within the community, emotional and psychological responses to the “coming out” process, and lack of acceptance interpersonally and intrapersonally. Research has been gathered to examine the rates of substance use and abuse amongst the general population of adolescents, and adolescents who openly identify as members of the LGBTQ population. The data is staggering with one study from Massachusetts determining binge drinking rates of LGBTQ adolescents at 46%, while adolescents who did not report to be members of the LGBTQ population had binge drinking rates of 33%. Use of marijuana, cocaine, and intravenous drug use also produced significantly higher rates amongst the LGBTQ adolescent population. A study out of Minneapolis indicates that 58% of LGBTQ adolescents were using alcohol and substances at rates that constitute abuse. In dealing with LGBTQ adolescents, a helpful component of prevention would be to facilitate understanding and acceptance of sexual minorities at local schools (Eisenberg et al., 2020). Anti-bullying campaigns, supportive school faculty, and LGBTQ school organizations are all associated with lower levels of alcohol and substance use.

While a mental health practitioner must demonstrate cultural competence to be effective in providing counseling services to a particular population, an effective prevention program must provide cultural relevance, including interventions consistent with the values and beliefs of the subculture (Reese et al., 2007). If cultural relevance is achieved in a prevention program, that program can benefit with higher rates of recruitment, greater retention, and greater outcomes. One mechanism to accomplish this outcome would be to incorporate suggestions, influence, and

participation from members of the target population. Another mechanism to promote cultural relevance would be to engage with individuals from the subculture to gather insight about the values of the community.

In acknowledging the benefits of engaging with LGBTQ adolescents, it is relevant to discuss the importance of confidentiality. ACA code B.1.c. pertains to respect for confidentiality (American Counseling Association, 2014). Counselors must recognize and protect the information shared with them, disclosing information only with appropriate consent. This is important to respect a client's confidentiality regarding their identifying as a member of the LGBTQ community. Maybe that client would benefit from becoming involved in an LGBTQ school organization, but the decision to disclose their identity through involvement with that organization is their discretion.

PART 5: ADVOCACY

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Advocacy can be defined as action with or on behalf of clients to enact change in their environments and lives, and in doing so achieve social justice (Murray & Crowe, 2016). An effective advocacy program incorporates a three-pronged approach: the client or student; the school or community; and the public. I will address barriers and proposed advocacy interventions for institutions, community, and public policy.

Partnerships are critical for success in advocacy, and therefore, working as a united front with the local middle and high schools is a valuable place to incorporate institutional interventions (Murray & Crowe, 2016). The school environment can be an influential place where an adolescent can learn and make decisions about life. The school environment can be an

encompassing factor with respect to the power of peer influences on behavior, including engaging in substance use (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). The peer relationships established through school and in an adolescent's neighborhood can be where the youth considers substance use as a possibility or not. It is believed that perceptions of harm of substance use, and health benefits of abstaining from substance use is thought to predict the extent of substance use (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). Therefore, encouraging parent and family input through the school system can garner support for the adolescents to avoid substance use. One step a counselor could take in advocacy is to introduce the "They hear you" campaign at PTA meetings across the community (SAMHSA). This engagement with the parents and guardians of the community could be characterized as a community collaboration, garnering support from parents and guardians who have a tremendous influence on how their children behave (Murray & Crowe, 2016, SAMHSA). The parents could be encouraged to have open communication with their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, enhancing their bond. Strong bonds with one's family of origin is a protective factor for adolescents vulnerable to substance use (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults).

The community is another aspect of society that has influence on an individual, with respect to explicit and implicit norms and values (Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies). The values and norms that are perpetuated by society can be internalized, and they can dictate behavior. Engaging in quantitative research about which values and norms have been internalized amongst the adolescent population could provide insight on how to proceed with advocacy (Murray & Crowe, 2016). The counselor could conduct a needs assessment at the local middle and high schools. Considering the results of the needs assessment, a counselor could facilitate meetings at local middle and high schools to talk about the dangers of alcohol and drug

use. In these talks at local schools, the counselor could address the issue of identity exploration being intertwined with alcohol and drug use. The narrative often presented in the media associates substance exploration with identity exploration (Substance Misuse Prevention for Young Adults). The counselor could be prepared to arm the adolescents with an alternative narrative that avoiding alcohol and substances in one's youth is associated with health. For instance, the counselor could educate the adolescents in the presentation, about how their brain is still developing, and substances can reduce potential intelligence, motivation, and increase impulsivity. Furthermore, the threat of addiction is higher for adolescents who engage in substance use.

Public policy, or the laws related to the city, state, or nation, has to potential to influence behavior and opportunities available for the general population. Considering the weight that legislation carries, it would be practical for a counselor advocating for their community to partner with the National Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, or the NAADAC (Helping you to help others). The NAADAC represents the interests of many addiction counselors across the nation and abroad. According to the NAADAC, in 2015, it was estimated that 2 million people met the criteria for addiction to opioids in the United States. To that point, there is a need for access to addiction treatment, and funding for research about treatment and prevention options. Therefore, advocacy could include requesting more funding for Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA (CADCA). A counselor could advocate for expanded funding for CARA which approaches addiction from six pillars: prevention, treatment, recovery, law enforcement, criminal justice reform, and overdose reversal.

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