



Substance Use and Mental Health Treatment Utilization Among Latinx Adolescents

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: Mental health needs and service utilization among Latinx youth specifically are critical to consider as ethnic minority youth experience decreased access to mental health care, and underrepresentation in the mental health care system (Doung et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2005). Grounded in an understanding of the intersection of sociocultural factors, accessibility, mental health needs, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the present study aims to identify how Latinx adolescent substance use is related to seeking non-substance use mental health services.

Subjects Used: Participants were Latinx adolescents, aged 12-17 who participated in the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). For the purposes of this study, secondary data analysis was conducted on a subsample of 3,012 Latinx adolescents.

Procedure: Analyses were conducted using the SPSS complex sampling function to account for the sampling design of NSDUH. Data analysis included descriptive and logistic regression analyses.

Results: Results from unadjusted logistics regression analyses revealed significant associations between demographic variables and treatment utilization. Specifically, English language usage (O.R. = 1.59) and male sex (O.R. = .67) were associated with more and less treatment utilization, respectively. Past year major depression (O.R. = 3.27) was associated with greater odds of treatment utilization. Finally, unadjusted associations were also found between alcohol use (O.R.= 1.44), marijuana use (O. R. = 1.86) and illicit drug use (O.R. = 1.94) and mental health treatment utilization. In the final adjusted model, only major depression and illicit drug use were associated with treatment utilization. Major depression increased the odds of treatment utilization nearly three times (O. R. = 2.7). Illicit drug use also increased the odds of treatment utilization (O. R. = 1.47).

Conclusion: This investigation adds to research surrounding substance use and treatment utilization for reasons other than substance use in Latinx adolescents in the United States. In this study, major depression and illicit drug use increased the odds of utilizing mental health treatment. Understanding substance use trends in Latinx adolescents is key to informing how practitioners should approach their work with adolescent clients, as well as how behavioral health policymakers define problems, needs, and solutions with prevention and intervention systems. Specifically, the findings underscores the importance of mental health practitioners assessing substance use when working with Latinx adolescents.

Research Question

Are Latinx adolescents who use substances currently seeking non-substance-related mental health services?

Methods

Subjects Used: Participants were Latinx adolescents, aged 12-17 who participated in the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). For the purposes of this study, secondary data analysis was conducted on a subsample of 3,012 Latinx adolescents.

Procedure: Analyses were conducted using the SPSS complex sampling function to account for the sampling design of NSDUH. Data analysis included descriptive and logistic regression analyses. A series of unadjusted logistic regression analyses tested simple associations between variables and treatment utilization. From there, an adjusted logistic regression analysis was conducted retaining significant variables from the unadjusted analyses. Covariates tested in unadjusted analyses included age, language version of the survey, biological sex and past year depression. Hypothesized variables included lifetime alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drug use. The outcome variable was any mental health treatment in the past year.

Table 1

Sample Descriptives

Variable	% of sample
Biological sex	
Male	51%
Female	49%
Language version	
English	83.5%
Spanish	16.5%
Age	
12-13	31.8%
14-15	33.0%
16-17	35.2%
Past Year Major Depression	
Alcohol Use	26.6%
Marijuana Use	15.8%
Illicit Drug Use	14.7%
Treatment Utilization	22.7%

Results

Results from unadjusted logistics regression analyses revealed significant associations between demographic variables and treatment utilization. Specifically, English language usage (O.R. = 1.59) and male sex (O.R. = .67) were associated with more and less treatment utilization, respectively. Past year major depression (O.R. = 3.27) was associated with greater odds of treatment utilization. Finally, unadjusted associations were also found between alcohol use (O.R.= 1.44), marijuana use (O. R. = 1.86) and illicit drug use (O.R. = 1.94) and mental health treatment utilization. In the final adjusted model, only major depression and illicit drug use were associated with treatment utilization. Major depression increased the odds of treatment utilization nearly three times (O. R. = 2.7). Illicit drug use also increased the odds of treatment utilization (O. R. = 1.47).

Table 2

Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals for Treatment Utilization

Variable	Unadjusted		Adjusted	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Biological sex	.67**	.52-.87	.81	.60-1.09
Language version	1.59*	1.11-2.28	1.34	.97-2.00
Age				-
13-14	.88	.67-1.14		
14-15	.93	.69-1.25		
16-17	-			
Depressive episode	3.27**	2.30-4.64	2.72**	1.88-3.93
Alcohol use	1.44*	1.05-1.96	1.01	.76-1.35
Marijuana use	1.86**	1.34-2.57	1.35	.95-1.91
Illicit drug use	1.94**	1.37-2.75	1.47*	1.03-2.10

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Discussion

This investigation adds to research surrounding substance use and treatment utilization for reasons other than substance use in Latinx adolescents in the United States. In this study, major depression and illicit drug use increased the odds of utilizing mental health treatment. Understanding substance use trends in Latinx adolescents is key to informing how practitioners should approach their work with adolescent clients, as well as how behavioral health policymakers define problems, needs, and solutions with prevention and intervention systems. Specifically, the findings underscores the importance of mental health practitioners assessing substance use when working with Latinx adolescents.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a susceptible stage in development regarding substance use and mental health issues. Recent increases in Latinx adolescent and young adult substance use, as well as the prevalence of major depressive episodes and suicidality, have added to growing concerns regarding the behavioral health of this demographic. Mental health needs and service utilization among Latinx youth specifically are critical to consider as ethnic minority youth experience decreased access to mental health care, and underrepresentation in the mental health care system (Doung et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2005).

The Theory of Planned Behavior has been used to understand treatment utilization within various populations, including adolescents who report substance use (Morell-Gomis et al., 2019). For Latinx individuals specifically, the Theory of Planned Behavior can facilitate understanding the various interlocking systems that may promote or hinder treatment utilization and inform prevention and intervention services for this population (Kam & Middleton, 2013).

