Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Abstract

Mediators and Moderators of the Associations between Unstructured Socializing with Peers, Substance Use, and Handgun Carrying Among Adolescents

by

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This dissertation seeks to provide an important addition to previous research on unstructured socializing with peers, adolescent substance use, and handgun carrying while also adding to future policy by providing new avenues by which to better identify the predictors of drugs use and handgun carrying.

The study contributes to knowledge in four ways. First, identifying variables that moderate and/or mediate the association between unstructured socializing and substance use and handgun carrying have theoretically relevant implications. Second, using a fine-grained measure of unstructured socializing with peers provides more precise results and greater insight for the line of research focusing on gender differences and time spent in unstructured activities among adolescents, and the risk that this poses for substance use and handgun carrying. Third, this research brings public awareness to the issues surrounding substance use and handgun carrying, provides a means to further understand the issues, and aids in future opportunities to remedy the problems. Last, understanding the relationship between unstructured socializing and substance use and handgun carrying can result in policy relevant implications, and can lead to intervention and prevention strategies that will decrease substance use, handgun carrying, and possibly even gun violence among adolescents.

Data for this study come from the 2018 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS). The FYSAS is a recurrent cross-sectional survey of public middle-school and high-school students in the state of Florida conducted annually since the 1999-2000 school year. The FYSAS includes items that enable the construction of mediating and moderating variables such as, ease of access, gender, bonds with parents, bonds at school, and neighborhood disorder. This data also allows for the consideration of a wide range of covariates that are correlated with unstructured socializing, substance use, and handgun carrying.

The results indicate that the (1) effect of unstructured socializing with peers on drug use and handgun carrying are partially mediated by ease of access, (2) the effect of unstructured socializing on soft drug use significantly varies by gender, (3) the effect of unstructured socializing on soft drug use significantly varies by levels of adolescent bonds with parents and levels of school bonds, and (4) the effect of unstructured socializing on handgun carrying significantly varies by neighborhood disorder.

Date: March 26, 2021
Time: 3:00 p.m.
Place: https://fiu.zoom.us/j/94039789939

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