



Adolescents' perceptions of the 'substance use violence nexus': a South African perspective

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore adolescents' perceptions of substance use as a contributing factor to community violence by employing a conceptual framework proposed by Goldstein. Data were collected from a sample of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 16 years by means of focus group interviews. Theoretical thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the findings. The participants' perceptions indicated that substance use and withdrawal symptoms induce physiological and behavioural modifications resulting in aggression and violence. The findings also suggest that participants believed that substance users frequently commit property and violent interpersonal crimes such as theft, robbery, assault and murder to procure their substances. Further, the adolescents' perceived violence to be rooted within gang culture as well as the involvement in shared markets for illicit substance trading.

Introduction

South Africa has among the highest rates of interpersonal violence in the world; with a homicide rate of 31 per 100,000, it ranks globally as the eighth most violent country. There is a large body of evidence that points to the causes of violence as being socio-historically located, with high rates of poverty and deprivation, social inequality, unemployment, patriarchal constructions of gendered roles and substance use identified as the key factors perpetuating violence (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2008; Hawkins et al. 2000; Maldonado-Molina, Jennings, and Komro 2010; Seedat et al. 2009; Seekings and Thaler 2010) Substance use in particular is regarded as a critical factor associated with various forms of violence (Seedat et al. 2009; Seekings and Thaler 2010)

The use of substances such as alcohol, cannabis and methamphetamine is a major public health problem in South Africa (Dada et al. 2014). With regard to substance use in the Western Cape Province, the highest prevalence rates of binge drinking (i.e. four/ five or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion for females and males, respectively) were reported (Peltzer, Davids, and Njuho 2011). Binge drinking was found to be highest in males (31.9%) and females (10.4%) among the previously disenfranchised Coloured (mixed race) population compared to other race groups (Peltzer, Davids, and Njuho 2011). The widespread use of crystal methamphetamine compounds the problem of alcohol use in the

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