

Interventions for adolescent substance abuse: an overview of systematic reviews

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Description:

Many unhealthy behaviors often begin during adolescence and represent major public health challenges. Substance abuse has a major impact on individuals, families, and communities, as its effects are cumulative, contributing to costly social, physical, and mental health problems. The authors conducted an overview of systematic reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to prevent substance abuse among adolescents. They report findings from a total of 46 systematic reviews focusing on interventions for smoking/tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, and combined substance abuse. The overview findings suggest that among smoking/ tobacco interventions, school-based prevention programs and family-based intensive interventions typically addressing family functioning are effective in reducing smoking. Mass media campaigns are also effective given that these were of reasonable intensity over extensive periods of time. Among interventions for alcohol use, school-based alcohol prevention interventions have been associated with reduced frequency of drinking, while family-based interventions have a small but persistent effect on alcohol misuse among adolescents. For drug abuse, school-based interventions based on a combination of social competence and social influence approaches have shown protective effects against drugs and cannabis use. Among the interventions targeting combined substance abuse, school-based primary prevention programs are effective. Evidence from Internet-based interventions, policy initiatives, and incentives appears to be mixed and needs further research. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions components with standardized intervention and outcome measures. Various delivery platforms, including digital platforms and policy initiative, have the potential to improve substance abuse outcomes among adolescents; however, these require further research.

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