

Editorial

Special Issue: *Social-Emotional Factors Related to Substance Misuse in Adolescents*

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It is my pleasure to organize the first *International Journal of Emotional Education (IJEE)* special issue on “Social-Emotional Factors Related to Substance Misuse in Adolescents.” Substance misuse remains a significant public health problem. Approximately 435,000 deaths per year in the U.S. alone are attributable to tobacco use (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012), with overconsumption of alcohol responsible for additional 85,000 deaths and illicit drug use responsible for 17,000 deaths (Mokdad et al., 2004). Worldwide, tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use are accountable for nearly 13% of all deaths (World Health Organization, 2009). Although many of these deaths occur in adulthood, the initiation and escalation of substance use typically occurs during adolescence when the brains and bodies of youth are most susceptible to the deleterious effects of drugs (e.g., Riggs et al., 2007; 2009). Additionally, early substance use during adolescence is a predictor of more persistent and severe substance use trajectories in adulthood (Anthony and Petronis, 1995; Riggs et al., 2007). The developmental progression to these extraordinarily high mortality rates highlights the critical importance of identifying factors associated with substance misuse in young people that may be modifiable through early intervention.

The primary aim of this Special Issue is to bring together recent research that considers a role for social-emotional factors in adolescent substance misuse. Identifying and regulating emotions, developing positive and healthy relationships, making responsible and healthy decisions, and constructively managing social challenges are critical social-emotional competencies that young people must learn in order to grow into healthy adults (Elias, 2006; Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). Youth who demonstrate mastery of these developmentally appropriate tasks are generally considered socially and emotionally competent and are more likely to thrive in social, behavioral, and academic domains (e.g., Payton et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2007). Conversely, young people with social-emotional deficits are more likely to be at risk for a number of

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academic, mental, and physical health problems (e.g., Trinidad and Johnson, 2002; Weissberg and Greenberg, 1998).

Research on the interface of social-emotional competence and public health is growing. However, traditional models of substance misuse have typically focused on the cognitive and/or behavioral factors associated with misuse, with less of a focus oriented toward social-emotional factors (Petraitis et al., 1995). Therefore, this Special Issue takes advantage of a timely opportunity to a) more clearly articulate the complex relationships among social-emotional skills and substance misuse, b) generalize models of substance misuse etiology cross-nationally as the global health burden of substance misuse increases, and c) translate models of substance misuse etiology to public health interventions. I believe that the select articles included in this Special Issue contribute to the current literature in each of these three areas.

The first two articles explore the multifaceted relationship between affect and substance misuse. First, Feagans Gould and colleagues explore the capacity of emotional distress and coping skills to influence risk for adolescent alcohol use. The authors do so by expanding upon two established models of alcohol use: the self-medication model in which individuals consume alcohol in order to decrease negative affective states (Conger, 1956), and a drinking consequences model in which emotional distress influences mood-related drinking consequences (Hussong et al., 2008). The authors contend that support for these two models during adolescence is somewhat limited. Additionally the authors argue for innovative strategies for real-time data collection which may be required to truly flesh out apparent associations between affect and alcohol use risk. To this end the authors employ a multi-method, multi-reporter strategy in which participants completed a three-week experience sampling protocol assessing thrice daily mood and daily alcohol use. Study results reveal that the relationship between emotions and substance use can be quite complex.

The second article from Ralston and colleagues takes a more dyadic approach to affect and its relationship to substance use. Specifically, the authors explore prospective associations between positive parent-child affective quality, which is characterized by warmth, support, and absence of harsh parenting practices during late adolescence and substance use in emerging adulthood. A significant feature of this contribution is that the study design spans two developmental periods of notable importance for substance use risk (i.e., late adolescence and emerging adulthood) (Arnett, 2004). The authors hypothesize that positive parent-child affective quality in late adolescence predicts decreased levels of smoking, drunkenness, and illicit drug use during emerging adulthood when many individuals are either attending college or starting their first job. Results generally confirm study hypotheses and are important in that they demonstrate that the quality of the parent-child emotional experience can influence substance use into a period characterized by newfound independence.

In the international spirit of the *IJEE*, the third article from Ferreira and colleagues investigates associations among a number of social-emotional competencies and substance use in a large, nationally representative sample of Portuguese adolescents. The authors correctly state that much of the extant literature linking social-emotional competence to substance misuse in adolescence has been conducted in the U.S.,

rendering it difficult to generalize this literature to countries with potentially differing cultural perceptions of what it means to be socially and emotionally competent. Interestingly, the authors confirm associations between social-emotional competence and substance misuse previously found in the literature with U.S. samples, but also find that significant associations were not universally evident, highlighting the need for more cross-national research.

In the special issue's final article, Lewis and colleagues demonstrate the capacity to translate basic research in social-emotional development to the prevention of substance misuse. Here, the authors provide evidence for the effectiveness of the *Positive Action (PA)* prevention program in promoting social-emotional skills in childhood as a mediator to adolescent substance misuse. In so doing they confirmed the underlying theory of the *PA* program in a high-risk population. This is an important contribution as it moves past simply demonstrating *that* their intervention is effective to demonstrating *how* their intervention is effective, which is an emerging challenge in the field of prevention science in general. As the authors state, the paper serves as a call to action for policymakers and school officials who are increasingly challenged to positively impact not only academic achievement, but also behavior and social-emotional and character development of students.

It is my hope that this Special Issue serves to move the field to consider a role of social-emotional factors in comprehensive theoretical models of adolescent substance misuse. I believe that the articles included contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationships among social-emotional factors and substance misuse, the extent to which this research can be generalized cross-nationally, and the capacity to translate this basic research to intervention. They also play a role in generating a number of questions to be answered moving forward. The first is to what extent is substance misuse a response to social-emotional difficulties versus substance use producing social-emotional problems? Ralston and colleagues, and Lewis and colleagues utilize longitudinal designs to support a prospective association from social-emotional factors to later substance use. Future studies should compliment this work and explore the extent to which the relationship between social-emotional skills and substance use may be bidirectional. Additionally, studies taking a cross-lagged approach would be able to inform the field as to whether social-emotional skills are a stronger predictor of substance misuse or whether substance misuse is a stronger predictor of social-emotional skills.

A second question of interest moving forward is which social-emotional skills most protect against substance misuse. Both Gould and colleagues', and Ferreira and colleagues' contributions to this Special Issue suggest that not only may some social-emotional factors be more strongly associated with substance misuse than others, but that these relationships may differ by type of substance (i.e., tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs). Future longitudinal research confirming these findings will inform more complete models of the etiology of substance misuse. In turn, these models can be translated into increasingly targeted interventions for substance misuse which, in terms of public health impact, is where the true value of this research may lie.

I hope that the readers of the Special Issue find the content stimulating and that it generates greater interest in the role that social-emotional factors can play in adolescent substance misuse. I would like to thank the authors for their valued contributions and each of the peer reviewers for their timely, thorough, and constructive feedback. I would also like to thank the editors of *IJEE*, Paul Cooper and Carmel Cefai, for giving me the opportunity to guest edit the Special Issue and for their support and flexibility throughout the process.

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