

High Socioeconomic Status of Young Adults in Relation to Substance Usage

Gwynyth Hansen

SUBSTANCE USAGE AND abuse is a topic that is commonly researched, theorized, and criticized when it comes to the poor and while many people who are marginalized deal with high rates of substance abuse, there's not much talk about the substance abuse that happens in households of higher socioeconomic statuses. Even though substance use and abuse, such as binge drinking, marijuana use, cocaine, and other substances is seen as taboo in higher classes, it happens quite often in new adults (aged 18 to 25) of high socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status is the position one or a household is in society based on multiple factors. These factors are including but not limited to income, wealth, education level, race, and profession. Most of the time, those in a higher socioeconomic status have higher education levels along with a higher income. Typically, the more money one makes, the more there is to use on common substances such as alcohol and drugs such as cocaine. These habits found in households of high statuses can heavily affect the young adults raised in those environments, especially as they are navigating through adult life and college. This idea that stable financial income can lead to correlations with certain substance abuse habits has intrigued many researchers. Multiple

studies have found that young adults of higher socioeconomic statuses are more likely to abuse and rely on alcohol and in some cases marijuana.

Depending on what socioeconomic status an adolescent was raised in, it can heavily impact what substances one could start abusing. In the article 'Socioeconomic Status and Substance Use Among Young Adults: A Comparison Across Constructs and Drugs' the authors Megan Patrick, Patrick Wightman, Robert Schoeni, and John Schulenburg from the University of Michigan, look at how high and low socioeconomic statuses differ in what substances are abused. They did this by looking at indicators of a family's socioeconomic status, like wealth, income, profession, and education level. Then they compared it to what substances were being used and how they were being used during young adulthood. The data they looked at was collected from young adults aged 18 to 23 from the National Study of Income Dynamics 2005-2007. This study looked at data from adolescents and their parent's socioeconomic status and the adolescent's habits of substance use such as alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. This allowed them to look into socioeconomic status' habits between the three substances being compared and how

these habits can relate to each other, societal norms, and pressures.

The results of this experiment that related most to many others were alcohol's relationship with adolescence in higher socioeconomic statuses. In the article, Patrick, et al. wrote that "Young adults in the highest income, highest wealth, and highest parental education had at least twice the odds as those in the lowest SES categories of being current drinkers" (Patrick et al. 777). On top of that, they found that those in higher socioeconomic statuses were more likely to binge drink and become reliant on alcohol or marijuana to relieve daily stresses. This is a much different outcome than what the young adults in lower socioeconomic statuses had. Those in lower status families were more likely to smoke cigarettes rather than binge drink or use marijuana. Based on income alone, the 28% of the young adults in the top quartile of income suffered from heavy binge drinking, whereas in the lowest quartile only 8.3% suffered from drinking episodes. (Patrick et al. 776) Similar patterns follow when looking at young adults with large amounts of wealth or ones that have college educated parents. The binge drinking rate is always higher among the higher status young adults.

It is quite clear that the socioeconomic status of a household or parents can heavily impact whether a young adult, typically the child of well-off parents, gets into alcohol use and abuse. In the article "Are Adolescents with High Socioeconomic Status More Likely to Engage in Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use in Early Adulthood?" Jennifer L. Humensky dives into whether one's socioeconomic class factors into addiction and abuse rates. While researching for this journal, she noticed that most articles and journals written about adolescents and substance abuse all had one thing in common, having a low socioeconomic status. This is what sparked the idea to review data from

the 1994-1995 data collection from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health and write the article to shed light that substance abuse can affect all adolescents, not just the ones in a lower socioeconomic class. In this journal, Humensky reveals that, against societal expectations, but aligning with Patrick et al.'s findings, teenagers and adolescents coming from households with higher socioeconomic statuses typically deal with higher levels of alcohol and marijuana usage.

In order to come to the conclusion that alcohol and marijuana rates increase with socioeconomic status, Humensky used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health. This data set was conducted on school aged American kids from grades 7-12 in 1994-1995. This study clustered the students based on race, school size, school type (public or private), ethnicity, income, and region. The parents of these children were also interviewed, and their data was based on their race, income, region, and education level. She also had a follow up interview with some of the respondents in 2001. The variables of substances in this study was alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and an 'other' category.

It was found that, especially as inflation and higher prices plague America, the prices for substances for commonly accessible drugs and alcohol have heavily increased. So for adolescents, those who have more money are typically more likely to fall into substance abuse and dependence because they have the most accessibility to said substances. Humensky describes the relationship between money and alcohol-specific abuse by saying, "adolescents with more spending money were more likely to drink frequently, binge drink and to drink in public" (Humensky 2). She also found that as the parent's education level gets higher, the rate of binge drinking and marijuana use

correlates with it. When a parent has a college-level education the likelihood to binge drink is 1.458 times higher than someone with high school educated parents (Humensky 4). Likewise, marijuana use follows this same pattern. Adolescents with parents that are college educated are 1.265 times more likely to use marijuana than their counterparts (Humensky 4). Thus, drawing to the conclusion that adolescents with higher socioeconomic statuses are more likely to fall into substance dependence.

This idea of having more money to spend equating to higher likelihood of substance abuse heavily applies to college and university students of higher socioeconomic statuses. In Chris Martin's article called 'High Socioeconomic Status Predicts Substance Use and Alcohol Consumption in U.S. Undergraduates,' he finds a similar outcome to Humensky's experiment within America's universities and colleges. In order to determine whether socioeconomic status dictated college student's addiction or abuse rates, Martin used a sample from Healthy Mind's 2016 study of 18,611 undergraduate students from across the nation. Each student was asked a few questions in the survey; their race, ethnicity, residency type (where they were living while attending school), relationship status, if they've done certain drugs over the past 30 days, frequency of alcohol usage, and how they cope with stress. Then, they had questions asked about their parent's socioeconomic statuses; two questions about the parent's degree of education and one question about how the participant would describe their household's finances growing up.

Once Martin collected and analyzed the data, he found that there was a distinct correlation between socioeconomic status and substance abuse. Martin found that race was one of the biggest factors that impacted substance usage. Because besides income, race can heavily dictate one's socioeconomic status. He states that, "Although

SES was a predictor of consumption, as hypothesized, race was a stronger predictor. Alcohol and drug usage were highest among Whites and lowest among Asians" (Martin 5). Race comes into play when looking at how likely an adolescent is to abuse and use substances. White adolescents typically have the highest rates because for a lot of students and adolescents of color, drug and alcohol abuse is too much of a risk, as they are more likely to be punished than their white counterparts (Martin 6).

White men and women are also the main demographic of fraternity and sorority housing on college campuses, and housing also has a huge impact on substance use. Martin found that, as expected, college students who live with their parents are less likely to abuse substances, while those living in fraternity or sorority housing were the most likely. He explained this correlation as, "Living with parents is a manifestation of low SES, representing fiscal constraints and attendance at a local school, but living in a fraternity or sorority house is a value-driven choice. The high effect sizes suggest that physical proximity and socially normative consumption robustly predict the individual consumption" (Martin 7). So in environments such as fraternities, it is much more normalized, almost expected even, that students drink and party more often. And because of the price tags and actions necessary to get into a sorority or fraternity, they typically are made up of students who come from wealthier backgrounds and are typically white.

In conclusion, socioeconomic status affects substance abuse on all levels, but the young adults in higher statuses are much more likely to fall into marijuana use and alcohol abuse. In all articles reviewed, they all came to that same conclusion. Alcohol and marijuana are some of the easiest substances to come across, with both being used as common stress reliefs. This can greatly appeal to young adults who have

some extra money to spend and are just getting into the world, dealing with school and daily stresses. Alcohol, especially, can cause a lot of harm when abused. It is commonly found in adolescent parties and gatherings but it is a strong depressant that can heavily take over one's life. And while it is important to recognize and speak up on the addiction problems in low socioeconomic statuses, they are constantly being investigated, persecuted and berated by those of

higher socioeconomic statuses even though they are falling to addiction as well. However, they just don't recognize it because these substances are such normal parts of society that they aren't realizing the heavy reliance that so many young adults have on a substance. This causes the devastating effects of the rampant alcoholism running through these young adults to not be taken seriously and many will suffer the consequences that come with such a strong addiction.

WORKS CITED

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