Are risk factors for drug use and offending similar during the teenage years?

Elizabeth V. Aston
School of Life, Sport and Social Sciences, Edinburgh Napier University, Sighthill Campus, Edinburgh EH11 4BN, United Kingdom
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Highlights

- Different factors were associated with drug use and offending in the older, but not younger teens.
- Early in the teenage years drug use was associated with a similar set of factors to offending.
- Later in the teenage years drug use should be understood and addressed differently to offending.
- The risk factors included here are more appropriate to understanding offending than drug use.

Abstract

Background

This paper explores whether at different stages of the developmental cycle of adolescence, drug use and offending are associated with a similar set of risk factors relating to: socio-structural position, informal social control, deviant peer group contexts, and deviant lifestyle behaviours.

Methods
Multivariate regression was used to analyse data from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC) self-report questionnaire.

Results

Early in the teenage years drug use was associated with a similar set of factors to offending. These include weak bonds to parents and teachers, and deviant lifestyle behaviours. However, later in the teenage years there were differences, e.g. drug use was associated with higher socio-economic status and importance of school, and a number of factors which were associated with offending were not associated with drug use, e.g. parent–child conflict, gang membership and hanging around.

Conclusion

Results show that the factors included here are more appropriate to understanding offending than drug use. Different risk factors are associated with drug use and offending in the older, but not younger teens. It is argued that later in the teenage years drug use should be understood and addressed differently to offending. This is particularly important given the tendency for the ‘drugs problem’ to increasingly be dealt with as a ‘crime problem’ (Duke, 2006).

Keywords:

Drug use, Offending, Teenage, Adolescence, Risk factors