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**Substance Abuse Treatment Effectiveness with Adolescents**

**Krystle A. Cole**

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**Washburn University**

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## **Abstract**

There are many treatment options in existence for substance abuse treatment that are specifically tailored to an adolescent's developmental, psychological, and social needs. Treatment is most successful if the adolescent completes the treatment program, if the program offers a full range of comprehensive services, if the program has experienced therapists, and if the program is larger has a larger budget.

## **Substance Abuse Treatment Effectiveness with Adolescents**

Substance abuse is a real problem for adolescents in America. According to SAMHSA (2003), around 2.2 million adolescents suffered from drug abuse and alcohol abuse in 2003. Adolescent substance abuse can continue into adulthood and can have a severe impact on the client's life. This means that coming up with effective substance abuse treatment options for adolescents is crucial.

There are many different treatment options available to adolescents and there have been many different studies comparing the efficacy of these treatment options. When Williams and Chang (2000) performed a review of the literature available on the effectiveness of adolescent substance abuse treatment, they identified 8 multi-program, multi-site studies and 45 single program studies. They found that, "The three main types of treatment are hospital inpatient, outpatient therapy, and therapeutic community programs."

Record keeping varied greatly within these different types of treatment and the studies often looked at different aspects of treatment. So much so, that it was difficult for them come to many definitive conclusions. Because of this, in the conclusion of their paper, they suggested that more study is needed to truly evaluate the effectiveness of the many different types of adolescent substance abuse treatment programs (Williams & Chang, 2000).

With that said, Williams and Chang (2000) did come to some conclusions. They reported that, "Treatment variables most consistently related to successful outcome are treatment completion, programs that provide comprehensive services, programs with

experienced therapists, and larger programs with larger budgets. Post-treatment variables most consistently related to outcome are attendance in aftercare and peer/parental social support."

Williams and Chang (2000) also noted that, "There is evidence that treatment is superior to no treatment, but insufficient evidence to compare the effectiveness of treatment types. The exception to this is that outpatient family therapy appears superior to other forms of outpatient treatment. There is no evidence concerning the relative merits of treatment setting, treatment length, treatment intensity, treating homogenous versus heterogeneous populations, or whether certain types of adolescents are best treated by certain types of programs."

It is important to note that adolescents require treatment options that are tailored to their specific psychological, developmental, and social needs. These specific needs must be addressed during substance abuse treatment for it to be successful. According to Mark et al. (2009), adolescents "...have higher rates of binge and opportunistic use, lower problem recognition, and higher rates of comorbid psychiatric problems as compared with adults." Mark et al. (2009) also mentioned that adolescents "...are likely to be more susceptible to different forms of influence such as peers in schools." In regards to their developmental needs, Mark et al. (2009) explained that "...adolescents are at a vulnerable stage of developmental change when they are first moving away from the family, developing identity formation, and highly focused on immediate concerns."

Some areas of adolescent substance abuse treatment need further refinement. Mark et al. (2009) explained that, "... although programs provide comprehensive assessments of the substance abuse needs of their clients well, they rarely attend to the mental or other medical needs that frequently co-occur with adolescent substance abuse and influence its course of treatment." Mark et al. (2009) further explained that, "...almost all facilities treating adolescents are conducting substance abuse assessments. However, far fewer facilities are conducting mental health assessments and fewer still are testing for infectious diseases common among illicit substance users."

Cultural competence is another important issue to consider when dealing with adolescent substance abuse treatment. According to Diller (2007), "Cultural competence is the ability to effectively provide helping services cross-culturally. It can reside in individual practitioners, in agencies, and in a system of care. It is generally defined by an integrated series of awarenesses and attitudes, knowledge areas, and skills."

Culturally competent services seem to be lacking when it comes to the substance abuse treatment of adolescents. According to Mark et al. (2009):

...respondents showed large gaps between the number of facilities accepting clients with specific cultural needs and the number of those with treatment programs specialized for those needs. Among treatment providers, 2,070 (82.8%) accepted women, 2,070 (82.8%) accepted men, and 2,369 (94.8%) accepted gays and lesbians. However, only 1,153 (46.1%) facilities offered specialized programs for women, 839 (33.6%) did

for men, and 156 (6.2%) did for gays and lesbians. Finally, only 1,232 (49.3%) of the facilities offered services in languages other than English.

### **Conclusion**

There are many treatment options in existence for substance abuse disorders that are specifically tailored to an adolescent client's developmental, psychological, and social needs. Some of these treatment options include inpatient therapy, outpatient therapy, family therapy, and therapeutic community programs. Although only small amounts of definitive data exist in regards to the efficacy of adolescent substance abuse treatment as a whole, some conclusions can be drawn from the data available. Treatment is most successful if the adolescent completes the treatment program, if the program offers a full range of comprehensive services, if the program has experienced therapists, and if the program is larger and has a larger budget. As for post treatment, it is important for the adolescent to attend after care programs and have adequate peer, social, and family support.

Culturally competent services for adolescents are lacking. It must be taken into account that each culture has specific beliefs and customs. In order to properly treat clients, these beliefs and customs must be taken into account when developing a treatment plan. There needs to be more education about the cultural needs of adolescent clients, more bilingual counselors, and more specific training in relation to therapy that addresses specific cultural needs.

## References

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