Substance Use Determinants in Jamaican Under-25s: Family, Peers, Spirituality and Maltreatment (Literature Review)

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Background

Substance use has numerous implications for under-25s – including adverse medical, psychiatric and academic consequences. In Jamaica, the 18-24 age range is the highest consumer of substances, with under-18 use commonplace[1]. Jamaica is undergoing rapid change in its attitudes and laws regarding substance use; understanding the reasons why under-25s use substances will help inform future interventions and policy decisions.

Aims

This review will investigate the determinants of substance use in under-25s in Jamaica, aiming to identify key sub-groups to target with interventions, and propose topics for further research.

Methods

A literature search was performed with Ovid, producing 379 results, of which 41 remained after inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied. Additional sources were utilised as the review was written. All research discussed pertains to under-25s in Jamaica.

1. Family relationships
   • Cannabis use was higher in stressful families[1]; cannabis is used as self-medication to cope with stressful family relationships.
   • A satisfying family life acts to mediate academic stress, reducing substance use[3].
   • No such relationship was found for tobacco and alcohol, whereas Oshi et al. (2018) found alcohol use to be higher in divorced-parent families (which experience more stressful relationships)[4].

2. Peer influences
   • Young Jamaicans at university encounter a social environment more accepting of substance use, so are more likely to use substances[5].
   • However, positive peer influences may mediate stress, particularly in the stressful university environment, discouraging substance use as a maladaptive coping mechanism.
   • Negative peer influences (e.g. peer pressure) predispose young Jamaicans to licit and illicit substance use[1].

3. Religion and Spirituality
   • Higher levels of spirituality are protective against substance use[1].
   • However, being Rastafarian made cannabis use 2.33 times more likely in males[6].
   • Cannabis used as a sacrament; users report greater mental clarity and connectedness with ‘Jah’ (God)[7].

4. Childhood maltreatment
   • Physical and emotional child abuse make substance more likely later in life in response to trauma[8].
   • Sexual abuse in childhood does not predict substance use in later life, contrary to international literature.

Conclusions: Various factors can protect against or predispose substance use in Jamaican under-25s. University students and under-18s brought up in single-parent families are key sub-groups to target with interventions. Further research on mechanisms by which these determinants work, particular religions and which determinant has the greatest effect is recommended. This review, and future research, can help inform policy decisions and intervention design for the key sub-groups found.

References