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Adolescent Substance Abuse Among Young People Excluded from School in Belfast

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Abstract

The lifestyles of young people excluded from school have received much attention recently, particularly in relation to illicit drug use. Commentators have acknowledged that they constitute a high-risk group to social disaffection and substance abuse. This paper reports on a group of 48 young people living in Belfast aged 13-14 years who are considered to be at a particularly high risk to substance abuse because they are excluded from school. The evidence in this paper suggests that many are already exhibiting potentially high risk behaviours to problem drug use compared with their contemporaries in mainstream education. The paper examines the evidence within the context of a limited existing literature base on this group of young people. It suggests that a more focused approach is required for the development of appropriate drug prevention strategies to meet their needs.

Introduction

School surveys of substance use are frequently used by academics, practitioners and policy makers to assess trends in alcohol, tobacco and other drug use (Hallfors et al 1997). The findings from these surveys play an important role in prevention programmes and policy development. For example data from such surveys in the USA have played a key role in developing national policy (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1997). However these sources are limited as a result of their failure to collect information on substance abuse from young people who are excluded from school. As a result they may underestimate drug use amongst young people of school age. In a study of school dropouts in the USA for example, Swaim et al (1996) reported substance use was between 1.2 and 6.2 times greater than among young people in school. Contemporary evidence suggests that school status and adolescent substance use are related (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 2002), with a range of studies over the past four decades reporting higher rates of substance use among school excludees than among young people who remain in mainstream school (Annis and Watson, 1975; Bruno and Doscher 1979; Elliot, Huizinga and Ageton, 1985; Fagan and Pabon, 1990; Kandel, 1975; Melrose 2000; Miller and Plant 1999; MORI, 2004; Powis et al, 1998; Goulden and Sondhi, 2001; Osler et al, 2002).

Day et al (1997) define young people at risk of social disaffection as those who are in danger of failing at school, in their social life, or in making a successful transition to work. Such risk factors may act in a cumulative, multiplicative way as the OECD claims that: 'two factors predict a four fold likelihood, while four factors predict a ten-fold likelihood of failure' (OECD, 1995, p.5). Lloyd (1998) identified young people at a high risk to drug abuse as the homeless, those 'looked after' by local authorities or in foster care, children from families with substance-abusing parents or siblings, young

people with conduct or depressive disorders, young offenders, truants, and those excluded from school. Catalano et al (1998) defined high risk to problem drug use as exposure to multiple risk factors, or an elevated level on one particular risk factor. These categories of young people consistently report higher levels of substance abuse and antisocial behaviour than young people not categorized as high risk. There is abundant evidence to show antisocial behaviour in adolescence is strongly associated with an increased risk of substance abuse (Weinberg et al, 1998; Gilvarry, 2000). Other evidence suggests that low commitment to social institutions may predispose young people to illicit drug use. Rutter (2002) claims that the act of rejecting an institution as fundamental to the society as school is also accompanied by the belief that the institution has in turn rejected the person in question. Young people excluded from school have failed to live up to the first major expectation of their lives and may likewise feel rejected in the first encounter with representatives of the greater community in which they live (Kaplan et al, 1994).

It is also well established that failure to address educational disaffection may constitute an important element in the development of social disaffection and criminal careers (Farrington, 1990). Links between educational disaffection and delinquency are well established (Ball and Connolly, 2000). This behaviour then brings young people into contact with another of society's institutions, the criminal justice system (Graham, 1988). The literature reports associations between substance use/abuse and crime (Rutter et al, 1998). One explanation for this is that they share the same set of risk factors (Catalano and Hawkins, 1997). Fergusson and Horwood (2000) from their analysis of the Christchurch Longitudinal Study showed that alcohol abuse in late adolescence increased involvement in crime (especially violent crime). This may raise

a question about the extent to which drug prevention initiatives offered to young people delivered in school are meeting the needs of all young people, especially those no longer in mainstream education. A simple replication of mainstream models to those excluded from school but attending alternative education provision may not adequately meet their needs. Belcher and Shinutzky (1998) believe this is a critical issue as the presence of risk factors for substance abuse has a cumulative effect and a negative correlation with drug use. The young people participating in this study (i.e. those no longer attending mainstream school) would be considered at a high risk of substance abuse. This contrasts with young people in general of this age who would be considered relatively low risk by some commentators because they were in early adolescence ((Smit et al, 2002; Manning et al, 2001). However, most of these young people will not return to mainstream schooling (Kilpatrick et al, 1999) placing them at an increased risk of experiencing social disaffection and drug abuse as a result of exclusion from mainstream school

The present study forms part of the Belfast Youth Development Study (BYDS), which is an investigation of the onset and development of adolescent substance abuse (McCrystal et al 2003). The study is following a group of young people who began secondary school in the autumn of 2000. It incorporates a high-risk booster sample of young people excluded from school but attending alternative education provision. The experience of these young people has been neglected by researchers in Northern Ireland despite the attention from academics and policy makers in the rest of the UK and beyond (Duncan and McCrystal, 2002). Many school-based studies do not include booster samples, however studies which have, reported higher levels of drug use in comparison with those not categorised as high risk (Leitner et al, 1993). This paper reports on drug using behaviours and risk and protective factors for young people no

longer attending mainstream school particularly in relation to offending behaviour and their experience of society's formal institutions such as school and the criminal justice system when they are at the equivalent of school year 10 (aged 13-14 years). Their experiences are compared with their contemporaries in mainstream school through reference to the findings from the BYDS school survey (Percy et al, 2003).

Methodology

The Sample:

Sixty-six young people excluded from school in the Greater Belfast area at school year 10 (aged 13-14 years) were identified for inclusion in the study. They were attending alternative education provision. Forty-eight (73%) participated in the study, 42 (87% were male). Among the others, three young people refused to participate even though their parents/guardians consented to their participation, fifteen (23%) were absent at the prearranged time for completion of the questionnaire. Several attempts were made to include these young people in the study but without success.

The Measuring Instrument

The questionnaire used in the study included questions on drug use, delinquency, family, school, leisure activities (McCrystal et al, 2003). This was developed from a search of contemporary research literature in the subject area, resulting in a combination of established measures (i.e Stattin and Kerr's (2002) Parental Monitoring instrument) and other measures developed by the research team. The full measuring instrument was subjected to dynamic piloting and consultation with young people and professionals in the field of drug prevention. It included 15 questions covering delinquent behaviours, experience of the criminal justice system, and attitudes to society's formal institutions such as school. The questionnaire was used in a survey of young people in mainstream

school year 10, i.e. 13/14 years (Percy et al 2003), and those excluded from school, the focus of this paper. Those in mainstream school will be referred to as the school sample and those excluded from school as the booster sample (as they constitute the High Risk Booster Sample of the BYDS).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was completed by the young people in the alternative education facilities they attended taking approximately 45 minutes to complete. Data was also collected from 4438 young people in year 10 attending 43 schools in the Greater Belfast area using the same questionnaire. All data collection was supervised by the research team with the co-operation of participating school and alternative education providers.

Data Analysis

Each completed measuring instrument was coded and inputted onto the SPSS software. Several categories of questions were created from the full list of questionnaire items. For example, commitment to school and motivation to do well there were constructed from 13 school questions. The leisure activities of the young people were investigated by asking a range of questions about the amount of time they spent doing activities at home (e.g. watching TV, reading books or magazines); with their friends (e.g. hang around on the street); and other outside activities (e.g. going to a local leisure centre/youth club). Preliminary findings from the school survey are reported elsewhere (Percy et al, 2003) but reference will be made to them in this paper. Gender differences are not reported for the young people excluded from school due to the small proportion of females in the sample.

Results

Questions on drug use included lifetime use (i.e. 'have you ever tried cannabis?'); recent use (i.e. 'have you tried cannabis in the past twelve months?'); and exposure to drugs (i.e. 'have you ever been offered cannabis?'). Alcohol is the most common substance used by the young people in the study, followed by tobacco with nine out ten young people reporting lifetime use (Table 1). Over three-quarters have been drunk at least once. These young people were one and a half times more likely to have smoked and nearly twice as likely to have been drunk compared with the school sample. Cannabis is the most frequently used illicit drug with over three-quarters (81%) of the booster sample reporting lifetime use, which is nearly three times the level of use reported by the school sample (Percy et al 2003). Half the young people reported lifetime use (i.e. at least once) of solvents, and more than one-quarter (27%), lifetime use of ecstasy, (four times the reported level of use among the school sample). Lower levels of hard drugs including amphetamines and cocaine were reported and use of heroin was non-existent. However, a higher proportion of the young people reported being offered all illicit substances than actually used them. This perhaps suggests that some may already be exhibiting protection against drug use, an important factor for addressing problem drug use and one that may provide useful insights for those responsible for the development of drug prevention strategies. But the data in Table 1 suggests that young people in the booster sample are less likely to refuse such an offer than the school survey.

Table 1: Drug Use and Prevalence Patterns

Drug	Been offered? School Exclueees (n=48) %	Been offered? School Survey (n=4438) %	Ever Used? School Exclueees (n=48) %	Ever Used? School Survey (n=4438) %	Last Year School Exclueees (n=48) %	Last Year School Survey (n=4438) %
Tobacco	-	-	90	62	81	42
Alcohol	-	-	92	87	85	77
Been Drunk	-	-	81	46	68	41
Solvents	65	28	48	14	27	10
Cannabis	90	47	81	32	75	28
Magic Mushrooms	19	8	8	3	10	2
Ecstasy	56	16	27	6	19	5
Speed	33	12	17	5	8	4
LSD	21	9	8	3	4	3
Cocaine	19	10	6	4	2	3
Heroin	4	5	0	2	0	1
Poppers	48	18	21	11	10	9
Other Pills	48	16	31	9	19	8

* School survey (Percy et al, 2003)

The young people were asked questions on problems they may have faced and associate with their use of substances listed in Table 1. These questions were a modified version of the drug abuse measure used in the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health and included questions about problems at home and at school; problems with family and friends; being in physical danger; being in trouble with the police; and mental and physical health problems that they associate with drug use. The convention for identifying a young person at risk of drug abuse (as recommended by the American Psychiatric Association) is frequent substance use (we define this as using drugs at least weekly) coupled with experiencing at least one substance related problem as identified by the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health. While relying on a single report as an indicator of hazardous substance use may not provide the most valid measure (taking account of other drug use dimensions, and examining the consistency of reports over time) a single year's data does give some indication of the progression of drug use beyond initial onset. This approach also has the ability to identify young people who appear to be at an increased risk of developing a serious drug problem. Forty-two per

cent of the booster sample met the criteria for drug abuse compared with just ten per cent of the school sample (Percy et al, 2003).

The frequency of substance use provides more detail on drug use patterns among this group (Table 2). Nearly three-quarters of smokers, smoke cigarettes every day (the number of cigarettes smoked was not requested from the young people), over half those who drink alcohol do so at least once a week, nearly half those who have been drunk report being intoxicated at least once a week. Over half of cannabis users do so at least weekly.

Table 2: Frequency of Drug Use

Substance	Only once %	2-5 times %	Once a Month %	Once a week %	>Once a week %	Used to %	Missing %	N*
Smoking	-	-	2	2	79	8	9	43
Alcohol	9	7	14	39	21	2	8	44
Drunk	5	10	18	31	15	3	18	39
Solvents	13	9	9	4	-	65	-	23
Cannabis	5	13	5	54	-	15	8	39
Ecstasy	8	15	15	8	-	8	46	13

* n indicates the number of young people excluded from school who reported use of each substance

Young people obtain licit and illicit substances from a variety of sources, indicating their wide availability. Friends are the most popular source for most substances, particularly older friends. For licit substances (cigarettes, alcohol) many young people purchase these from shops themselves, over three-quarters purchase their own cigarettes. Over half (61%) of cannabis users obtain the substance from a ‘dealer’ and nearly one-quarter of young people said they obtain ecstasy from a ‘dealer’. Other sources include home or a family member; this includes siblings and parents (another indicator placing young people at a high risk to drug abuse). The most popular location for substance use is in the street, a park or the town centre. A friend’s house or a party

(possibly the same location) are the next most popular locations for alcohol use and becoming intoxicated, or for using cannabis or using ecstasy. Other locations such as a youth club or community centre are less popular locations. This may also indicate that the young people participating in the study are less likely to attend these venues.

The young people were asked questions about 15 types of delinquent behaviour during the twelve month prior to the survey. These questions include incidents that would normally be treated as antisocial (i.e. rowdy behaviour in public) and much more serious incidents (i.e. arson, traveling in a stolen car). As a result it may be safer on this occasion to refer to these acts collectively as delinquent behaviour rather than criminal behaviour. Only four (8%) young people did not report any type of delinquent behaviour (Table 3). Among the others the most frequent form of delinquency was being rowdy in public with nearly three-quarters reporting this, two thirds reported drawing graffiti on walls, or fighting, over half (58%) reported shoplifting and vandalism (56%). Perhaps more worrying over one-third (38%) admitted to 'joyriding' (travel in a stolen car) or having carried a weapon in case it was needed for protection. Young people in the school sample were less likely to report delinquency and anti-social behaviour. In relation to more serious offences, the young people in the booster sample were three times more likely to 'joyride' (travel in a stolen car), and five times more likely to commit burglary than those in the school sample (Percy et al, 2003). Those reporting higher levels of delinquency also registered higher levels of drug use (Table 3). The four young people who did not report any delinquency did however report lifetime alcohol use and lifetime tobacco use, however, they reported relatively low levels of use of other substances compared with those who did report delinquent behaviour. However this small number makes it difficult to form a more conclusive

insight from this finding.

Table 3: Frequency of Delinquent Acts by Drug Use

Number of Delinquent Items	Tobacco %	Alcohol %	Drunk %	Solvent %	Cannabis %	Ecstasy	Total Excludes %	n*
None	100	100	50	25	50	0	8	4
1-3	81	81	69	37	63	6	33	16
4-6	88	100	100	63	63	38	17	8
7-9	100	100	91	55	100	27	23	11
10+	90	89	89	56	89	67	19	9

- n indicates the number of young people excluded from school who reported the number of delinquent items in each category

The level of contact with formal criminal justice agencies such as the police and courts perhaps indicate more serious delinquent or offending behaviour. The young people were asked if they had contact with the police, been arrested, been formally cautioned, or summoned to court for their behaviour. The specific reason for these contacts was not recorded. The young people reported frequent contact with the criminal justice system (Table 4). Most young people (88%) have been in trouble with the police, nearly three quarters (71%) have been cautioned or arrested, approximately one-fifth on six or more occasions. Over one-quarter (27%) have been summoned to court as a result of action they have taken. Among the school sample only 32 per cent of the young people have been in trouble with the police, the majority on just one or two occasions. Only nine per cent of those in the school sample have been arrested, only three per cent of school survey has committed offences that resulted in a court appearance (Percy et al, 2003).

Table 4: Frequency of Contact with Criminal Justice System

Delinquent item	none	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-9 times	10+ times	Total %	N*
Police	13	17	27	10	33	88	42
Arrested	29	38	13	4	15	71	34
Cautioned	29	33	21	8	8	71	34
Court	73	13	8	2	2	27	13

* n indicates the number of young people excluded from school who reported contact with each agency

Contact with the criminal justice system was associated with higher levels of substance use (Table 5). Young people who have been to court reported the highest levels of substance abuse but as only 13 (27%) committed offences resulting in a court appearance this makes it difficult to reach firm conclusions on this issue.

Table 5: Contact with the Criminal Justice System by Drug Use

Delinquent item	Tobacco %	Alcohol %	Drunk %	Solvent %	Cannabis %	Ecstasy %	Total %	N*
Police	95	98	88	55	88	26	88	42
Arrested	91	94	91	62	85	32	71	34
Cautioned	94	94	88	56	88	27	71	34
Court	100	100	100	69	92	23	27	13

* n indicates the number of young people excluded from school who reported contact with each agency

A number of aspects of the lives of the young people were examined in relation to their family, school and leisure activities. The level of parental monitoring and supervision received by the young people was measured using Statton and Kerr's (2000) 'Parental Monitoring Instrument'. This was assessed under four categories consisting of disclosure (e.g. young people proactively offer information to parents 'do your parents know what you do with your free time?'), solicitation (e.g. parents proactively seek information, 'how often do your parents ask you to talk about things that happened during your free time?'), control (e.g. parental approval of activities in advance, 'do you

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need to have your parents permission to stay out late on a week day evening?') and monitoring (e.g. parents being fully aware of their activities and behaviour 'how often do your parents talk with your friends?').

Over three-quarters (81%) of the young people reported low disclosure; over half (58%) low solicitation and more than half (54%) low control (Table 6). This compares with just over half (57%) school sample reporting low disclosure; and 53 per cent reporting low parental solicitation and 47 per cent low control. In relation to parental monitoring over two-thirds (69%) of the booster sample reported low monitoring compared with 52 per cent of the school sample. For this group of young people low parental disclosure, low parental control and low parental monitoring was associated with higher levels of substance use. The trend was less clear in relation to parental solicitation and drug using behaviour.

Table 6: Family Monitoring and Drug Use

Monitoring Level	Number School Excludes	Percentage School Excludees	Number School Survey*	Percentage School Survey
Low Disclosure	45	81	2572	57
High Disclosure	45	19	1856	43
Low Solicitation	45	58	2357	53
High Solicitation	45	42	2055	47
Low Control	45	54	2116	47
High Control	45	46	2298	51
Low Monitoring	45	69	2265	52
High Monitoring	45	31	2167	48

NB: 3 young people did not answer this question

* A small number of young people in the school survey did not complete all questions in each category of the parental monitoring instrument.

Perhaps not surprisingly, two-thirds (67%) of the young people in the booster sample reported low commitment to school (e.g. 'I think going to school is a waste of time') and

more than three-quarters (79%) reported low motivation (e.g. level of educational aspirations, such as wanting to sit GCSE's, A levels or go to university) to do well there. Over half (54%) the school sample reported low commitment and 56 per cent reported low motivation to do well there (Percy et al 2003). There appears to be an association between these factors and alcohol intoxication; and solvent abuse. However, in relation to other substances the trend was less clear.

Table 7: School Factors by Drug Use

School Factor	Drunk (n=39) %	Solvent (n=23) %	Total %	n
Low Commitment*	88	59	67	44
High Commitment*	67	33	33	44
Low Motivation**	84	55	79	43
High Motivation**	60	40	21	43

• n indicates the number of young people excluded from school who answered all questions in this category

* Four young people did not answer this question

** Five young people did not answer this question

Nearly all young people (92%) reported low levels of home based activities (e.g. listening to CDs) with just four (8%) reporting high levels of home based activities. Young people in the school sample were three times more likely (27%) to report higher levels of home based activities. Nearly two-thirds of the booster sample reported high levels of friends based activities (i.e. hanging round the street), over half reported high levels of out of home activities (i.e. go to a leisure centre), compared with just over one-third (36%) of the school sample. There appears to be an association between leisure activity and drug use with those who report higher levels of out of home based activity reporting higher levels of drug use.

Table 8: Leisure Activities and Drug Use For Young People Excludes from School (n=48)

Leisure Factor			Tobacco	Alcohol	Drunk	Solvent	Cannabis	Ecstasy	Total
			%	%	%	%	%		%
Low	Home	Acts	89	91	82	50	82	27	92
(n=4)									
High	Home	Acts	100	100	75	25	75	25	8
(n=46)									
Low	Friends	Acts	94	88	71	47	77	24	40
(n=16)									
High	Friends	Acts	90	97	90	48	86	31	60
(n=32)									
Low	Out of Home	Acts	90	100	85	55	80	25	44
(n= 21)									
High	Out of Home	Acts	89	85	78	41	82	26	56
(n=27)									

The leisure activities of the young people were further examined through investigating how they spend their free time by asking how many evenings of the week they go out with their friends (i.e after 6.30pm). Only two young people do not go out in the evening, four go out less than four evenings each week with three-quarters saying they go out every evening compared with approximately one-third (37%) of the school survey who go out each evening (Percy et al 2003). Young people who go out every evening reported the highest levels of illicit substance use. In relation their financial situation and spending ability, all young people reported receiving pocket money on a weekly basis (mean =£13.33) with twenty-nine saying they receive additional income from working (mean = £10.44 per week) a factor sometimes associated with higher

levels of drug use in adolescence (Greenberger et al, 1981; Mortimer et al, 1992; Steinberg et al, 1982). They have more money to spend than those in the school survey (mean pocket money = £9.49 and mean earning of £6.67 from working).

Discussion

The findings from this study profiles a group of young people who by the age of 14 years are already moving beyond recreational drug use with many already using cannabis on a weekly basis. A substantial proportion are already indicating a propensity to drug abuse, high levels of social disaffection as well as dissatisfaction with society's institutions such as school. They may already be moving to the margins of society placing them at risk of social exclusion. To fully comprehend the value of these findings it is important to highlight several issues. Firstly, the particularly high levels of substance abuse amongst the booster sample compared with the school sample is quite stark. In addition, many are not included in the official school exclusion figures for Northern Ireland for the 2002/2003 school year (the year of the survey) and form part of what Gillborn (1993) and Stirling (1993) term the 'informally excluded' perhaps further highlighting a need to redress the paucity of empirical research in Northern Ireland (Duncan and McCrystal, 2002). The young people already lead a lifestyle that includes antisocial behaviour and substance abuse which may play an increasing role in their lives in later adolescence and beyond .

The findings are a particular concern as they belong to a group of 13 and 14 year olds who appear to becoming detached from society's institutions and accepted norms due to relatively high levels of offending and criminal activity. This perhaps suggests they are moving towards a lifestyle that involves more problematic drug use. One particular

concern in this respect is the source of illicit drugs as many now obtain these themselves with the role of a 'dealer' a prominent one for obtaining cannabis and ecstasy.

The findings also show an even more worrying trend as half the young are now regular cannabis users and are regularly intoxicated (at least weekly for each behaviour). Detachment from mainstream education further places the young people at a risk to developing problem drug behaviour. Furthermore high levels of delinquency were reported by a significant proportion of the young people including carrying a weapon, robbing someone, breaking into a building or car, or arson. The findings in this study are supported by the recent MORI Youth Survey 2004 which questioned over 5000 young people between the ages of 11-16 years. This survey reported substantially higher levels of illicit drug use and offending by young people excluded from school compared with young people in school. Drug preventive strategies designed to be accessible to these young people are an urgent priority.

These findings suggest that appropriate drug prevention policy and practice should include school adjustment with efforts aimed at reducing the likelihood of school exclusion, and assisting their opportunities to set and achieve educational goals which could act as a protective factor from substance use. A number of the young people were offered illicit substances but did not use them; perhaps suggesting they may be exhibiting a measure of protection to drug use. The reasons for this may inform future development of prevention programmes as well as forming the basis for a more in-depth qualitative study of the lifestyle of young people that could fully unravel the nature of current protective influences. The present study provides information on the full range of 'hard' drugs being offered to young people at 13/14 years and the contrasting

lifestyles of those no longer attending school (compared to their contemporaries in mainstream education). This empirical evidence may provide insights for those charged with the development of prevention programmes in adolescence both in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Challenges for ensuring the delivery of such targeted prevention programmes include identifying those most in need by developing a full profile of their lifestyle after they stop attending school and ensuring they have the opportunity to access such facilities. The empirical base on the drug using behaviors and life styles of young people excluded from school remains relatively limited compared with those who remain in school due to their omission from school based surveys. The present study overcame this methodological difficulty when locating the young people. However this can be a highly resource intensive exercise but a necessary one if we are to highlight the level of risk to which these young people are exposed, and develop the appropriate approaches to prevention required to meet their needs.

Clearly a significant proportion of young people in this study are exhibiting the early signs of problem drug use as they smoke cigarettes daily, drink alcohol to intoxication, and use cannabis on a weekly basis. Whilst the young people in the study are receiving educational and social support relative to their assessed needs, they will not receive the formal drugs education that is now part of the school curriculum in Northern Ireland (DENI, 2002). The development of prevention programmes designed to meet their specific needs and delivered within a support network accessible to them are of particular importance to prevent them moving to the margins of society at an accelerated pace.

The Next Step

The findings in this study suggest an increasingly difficult period ahead for a group of young people already at risk of increased levels of problem drug use and potentially social exclusion. The findings may provide empirical evidence for those responsible for the development of appropriate strategies for drug prevention among school excludees. The study has also highlighted and overcome methodological difficulties to studying young people excluded from school. In doing so it provides an example of the valuable role of high risk booster samples alongside school based surveys, which could become an inherent part to researching young people of school age. This is particularly important if the examination of the lifestyles of those excluded from school is to be properly reported.

A full profile of the life experiences of young people excluded from school throughout adolescence is required in order to inform policy makers and practitioners in the drug prevention field. The contemporary literature on their lifestyle demands particular attention. Such attention will assist those responsible for the development of appropriate drug prevention strategies for adolescents at a higher risk of problem drug use and a propensity to anti-social behaviour. The present study has highlighted the value of such research, despite its high resource requirements, for providing valuable insights into the lives of school excludees, and to our understanding of young people at a high risk of drug use.

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