

AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE ASSOCIATION OF ADOLESCENT SUBSTANCE USE AND EATING AND WEIGHT LOSS ATTITUDES

Authors:

REBEKAH L. THOMAS^{1,2}, ADRIAN B. KELLY¹, GARY C. K. CHAN¹, LEANNE M. HIDES³, CATHERINE A. QUINN³, DAVID J. KAVANAGH⁴ & JOANNE W. WILLIAMS⁵

1. Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
2. School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
3. Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
4. Centre for Youth Substance Abuse and Centre for Children's Health Research, Institute of Health & Biomedical Innovation, and School of Psychology & Counselling, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane Australia
5. School of Health & Social Development, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

Presenter's email address: r.thomas@uq.edu.au

Introduction and Aims:

This study aims to assess gender differences in the relationship between tobacco and alcohol use, and eating and weight loss attitudes (EWAs) among adolescents, while controlling for potential confounds (age, country of birth, psychological distress, pubertal development, peer alcohol and tobacco use, and sexual activity).

Design and Methods:

Students between 11 and 17 years of age (N = 10,273) from high schools in the State of Victoria (Australia) completed school-based surveys. Independent sample t-tests and chi-squared analyses were used to compare adolescents who had and had not engaged in tobacco or alcohol use. Logistic regressions, including an interaction of EWAs and gender, were used for post hoc analyses.

Results:

The interaction between EWAs and gender was significant for tobacco use but not for alcohol use. For females, but not males, tobacco use were positively and significantly associated with EWAs. This finding was significant after controlling for potential confounds.

Discussion and Conclusions:

Tobacco use was related to EWAs in adolescent females but not males, and this is consistent with the possibility that females use tobacco in an instrumental fashion to control weight.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

Conventional prevention programs typically address specific problems (most commonly, tobacco use). The results of this study suggest that addressing eating and weight may need a special focus in prevention or indicated prevention programs.

Implications for Translational Research

Acknowledging the potential functionality and interdependency of adolescent health risks may improve the reach and impact of prevention programs. Amongst adolescent females, eating and weight loss attitudes may reduce the effects of tobacco prevention.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Data analysis was supported by ARC Discovery Project DP130102015