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Substance Use and Delinquency among Adolescents with Childhood ADHD: The Protective Role of Parenting

Walther, Christine A.P. & Cheong, JeeWon & Molina, Brooke S.G. & Pelham, William E., Jr. & Wymbs, Brian T. & Belendiuk, Katharine A. & Pedersen, Sarah L.

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Several domains of parenting have been identified as important for adolescent well-being. Whether these same domains are equally beneficial for adolescents with ADHD histories remains an empirical and clinically important question. This study examined whether parental knowledge of their teen's activities and whereabouts, consistency, support, and parent-adolescent conflict are associated with substance use and delinquency similarly for adolescents with and without a diagnosis of ADHD in childhood. A sample of 242 adolescents, 142 diagnosed with ADHD in childhood and prospectively followed into adolescence, and 100 without ADHD in childhood, were the focus of study. The relations between adolescent-reported outcomes (i.e., substance use and delinquency) and parenting behaviors were tested using latent variable modeling to determine both the effects of general (common) and specific (unique) parenting behaviors for participants with and without a history of ADHD. Adolescents' report of parental knowledge was a significant correlate of delinquency and substance use above and beyond other parenting variables and the variance in common across the parenting variables. More knowledge was associated with less delinquency and substance use for all participants, but parental knowledge was more strongly associated with alcohol use for adolescents with versus without childhood ADHD. These correlational findings suggest that, despite the increased difficulty of parenting youths with ADHD histories, actions taken by parents and youth to increase parental awareness may provide some protection against behavioral transgressions known to be elevated in this population.