

Stress, Substance Use, and Risky Sexual Behavior Among Homeless Adolescent Youth

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among stress, substance use, risky sexual behaviors, and sexual abuse history in a sample of homeless adolescents. The homeless adolescent population is at higher risk for poor health behaviors including substance use and risky sexual behaviors than housed adolescents. This population is also known to experience higher amounts of stress and higher occurrence of sexual abuse history than their non-homeless counterparts. The participants ($N=47$) included in this study were between the ages of 18-23 years and were homeless or street involved in urban Central Texas. Twenty-three participants (50%) reported "yes" to having a history of sexual abuse. A majority of the participants reported smoking ($n=40$). Data were taken from a self-reported survey used as a pretest of an intervention study. These participants received services from a street outreach program. There were no statistically significant relationships between the present stress levels ($M=28.49$) and substance use and risky sexual behaviors, but stress was significantly related to history of sexual abuse ($r = 0.385, p < .01$) and to a history of smoking within the last year ($r = 0.289, p < .05$). Substance use and risky sex were also significantly related ($r = 0.306, p < .05$). Given the high prevalence of substance use, risky sexual behaviors, and history of sexual abuse history found in the survey responses, further research with a larger sample size is needed to examine the presence of significant relationships among these variables.