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Substance Use and Other Social Deviance

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Introduction

This chapter presents data on the prevalence of substance use and its relationships to other social deviance among two cohorts of young adolescents residing in Dade County, Florida. Four racial or ethnic subgroups are included in the analyses: (1) those of Hispanic heritage born in the United States, (2) those of Hispanic heritage born outside the United States, (3) African Americans, and (4) White non-Hispanics (WNH). The chapter begins with a general discussion of social deviance and substance use followed by a brief outline of the most salient components of a number of theories postulated to explain the origins, development, and cessation of deviant behaviors. The analyses include basic descriptive longitudinal findings for both substance use and social deviance among those in the sample, and they center on how these two sets of behaviors are related over the three time periods in which the data were collected. The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings.

Social Deviance

Ancient codes of conduct that include bodies of prescribed and proscribed behaviors, as well as guidelines regarding punishments for those violating those codes, offer strong historical evidence that deviance has always been present in social groups and societies. Moreover, ethnographic studies reveal that throughout much of human history, deviance was attributed largely to devils, witches, evil spirits, demon possession, and other supernatural sources. Given these presumed
causes, it is not surprising that deviants were most often subjected to exorcism rituals and rights of purification designed to placate angry deities, as well as physical punishment, death, and excommunication. Modern societies, as with those of antiquity, are confronted with individuals who violate the norms that define the boundaries of behavior. However, for the most part, social deviance is no longer attributed to supernatural forces; modern social and biological sciences have largely supplanted these earlier explanatory systems. Modern sciences, notwithstanding, the etiologic factors underlying deviant behavior have not been definitively identified, in spite of massive and prolonged efforts, and the search goes on.

Definitions of Deviance

The literature is replete with varying definitions of social deviance with most of the differences being attributable to the theoretical, philosophical, and heuristic orientations of those offering them. In spite of these differences, there is a consensus regarding the key elements found in most definitions. At the broadest level, deviance can be said to occur when the attitudes, beliefs, characteristics, and behaviors exhibited by individuals or classes of individuals violate the normative standards of groups that have the power to impose negative sanctions on those judged to be in violation of those standards. It is important to note that those being judged as deviant may or may not be members of the group imposing the standards and sanctions. Deviants may hold membership in the judging group, they may be nonmembers seeking admission to the judging group, or they may be nonmembers not desiring membership in the judging group.

Explicit in the definition offered above is the supposition that attitudes and beliefs, as well as behaviors, that do not coincide with the normative values of the larger society are sometimes regarded as deviant and can lead to negative sanctions. And in many societies, violations of traditional attitudes and beliefs are still taboo. However, it is obvious that in contemporary America the mere possession of attitudes and beliefs that are incompatible with those of society at large does not necessarily produce social conflicts or negative legal sanctions. For example, individuals whose attitudes and beliefs lead them to conclude that there is nothing morally or ethically wrong with the use of marijuana or cocaine are not likely to come to the attention of the criminal justice system unless they act on those attitudes and beliefs; neither are they likely to incur extralegal negative sanctions. This does not mean that those wishing to understand social deviance should discount the role that attitudes and beliefs play in producing deviant behavior. Kaplan and his colleagues have shown conclusively that attitudes and beliefs that predispose individuals to deviance are excellent predictors of subsequent deviant behaviors (Kaplan, Martin, & Johnson, 1986; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1987).