

## LOW OTHER-REGARD AND ADOLESCENT ADDICTION

Pagano, M.E., Swaringen, S.E., Frank, S.H.

### ABSTRACT:

*Purpose:* Adolescent substance use disorders have dramatically increased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in tandem with a substantial decline in youth volunteerism. Although 12-step theory posits egocentric-thinking as a root cause of addiction, prior research to support this association among youth is limited. The purpose of this study is to determine if poor other-oriented regard is a characteristic associated with addiction in a large sample of adolescents.

*Method:* This quasi-experimental study matches 195 youth with addiction by age group, gender, minority status, and zip code to normative youth with some (N=195) and no alcohol or drug (AOD) use history (N=195). Background characteristics, substance use history, and other-oriented regard indices were assessed using items from the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. A binary logit model stratified by pair assignment tested the difference between AOD youth groups in other-regard as expressed by likelihood of low volunteerism, driving under the influence (DUI), and unprotected sex.

*Results:* Alcohol, marijuana, and non-prescribed control substances were the most commonly abused drugs among youth with addiction and some AOD use history. There were no significant background or physical health differences between youth AOD groups with one exception: youth with addiction and some AOD use history had twice the rate of sexually transmitted disease (STD) than never-users (15% vs. 8%;  $p < .01$ ). Addicted youth had significantly greater risk of DUI (OR=1.64,  $p < .0001$ ) than youth with some AOD use history. The risk of having unprotected sex with a STD history was significantly greater among addicted youth in comparison to youth with some AOD use history (OR=1.59,  $p < .01$ ), who had greater risk than their peers with no use history (OR=1.33,  $p < .01$ ).

*Conclusion:* Findings suggest that addiction is tied to poor awareness of the impact of behaviors on others. Alcoholics' attendance at Al-Anon meetings may increase their awareness of how their actions harm others, which may in turn curb self-centered thinking associated with untreated alcoholism.