

Abstract

During adolescence, there is a tendency towards seeking excitement, taking risks, and exploring, often including experimentation with psychoactive substances. Cannabis and alcohol belong to this category and can have detrimental effects on both the mind and body of young users. Given the rising usage of these substances among Israeli adolescents and the associated negative impacts, our study focuses on identifying psychological and environmental factors that may protect adolescents from initiating or continuing substance use. Specifically, we examine the protective roles of parent-teen communication, teacher-teen communication, mental well-being, and life purpose.

The study involved 432 participants aged 14-18, comprising 170 boys, 260 girls, and 2 participants who preferred not to specify their gender. We aimed to answer several research questions: (a) Is there a correlation between parent-teen communication, teacher-teen relationships, self-well-being, life purpose, and the presence of alcohol and cannabis use disorders? (b) Are there gender differences in the prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use disorders among adolescents? (c) How do demographic factors and positive relationships with parents and teachers, along with self-well-being and life purpose, contribute to predicting alcohol and cannabis use disorders?

The findings of this study revealed significant negative correlations between alcohol and cannabis use disorders and factors such as communication with parents, communication with teachers, mental well-being, and a sense of meaning in life. This means that teenagers who reported having good communication with their parents, strong relationships with their teachers, mental well-being, and a sense of purpose in life were less likely to report having alcohol and cannabis use disorders. Additionally, the study found that boys were significantly more likely than girls to report these disorders.

Previous research in Israel has mainly focused on the statistical frequency of alcohol and cannabis use, with few studies exploring protective factors against addictive behaviors. Moreover, no prior studies have simultaneously examined the relationships between parents, teachers, and teenagers in this context. The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on protective factors rather than risk factors for addiction and its examination of the important ecosystems in an adolescent's environment. This study underscores the importance of identifying and addressing cannabis and alcohol use disorders by fostering protective factors among adolescents and emphasizing the role of their educational environment, particularly the influence of parents and teachers.