

The Turning Point of Substance Use among Disadvantaged Young People in England: A Mediation Analysis

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Objectives

Although the overall tendency of substance use among disadvantaged young people dropped during previous decades in England, there was a rebound in 2016, separating the anti-illicit drug campaign into two phases.

This study examines mechanisms of substance use related to disadvantaged backgrounds among young English people in the two phases.

Data

Datasets

- Survey of Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England from 2011 to 2021

Sample

- 55284 observations
- Aged between 11 and 15

Modelling

Mediation analyse

- First phase: 2011-2015
- Second phase: 2016-2021

Subgroups

- Gender
- Age
- Region

Variables

Substance use

- the use of class A, B or C drugs, temporary class drugs or psychoactive substances

Disadvantaged background

- the bottom tier of family affluence scale scores

Mediators

- family support, social support, health services, media and school education.

Results

Table 1 Mediation effects

		(1) 2011-2015	(2) 2016-2021
Mediators	Family support	-0.30** (0.021)	-0.15* (0.028)
	Social support	-0.03 (0.043)	-0.07 (0.066)
	Health services	-0.11 (0.063)	-0.08* (0.023)
	Media	-0.12 (0.022)	-0.36* (0.025)
	School education	-0.21* (0.032)	-0.07* (0.027)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** and * indicate p<0.01, p<0.05 and p<0.1 respectively.

Before 2016

- Family support takes the largest part (30%) in the reduced substance use.
- School education takes the second largest proportion (21%).

After 2016

- Media contributes the largest (36%) to the substance use reduction.
- Family support weights the second (15%).
- Health services become the third force (8%).

Results

Table 2 Mediation effects by subgroup

	(1) Female 2011-2015	(2) 2016-2021	(3) Aged 11 and 12 2011-2015	(4) 2016-2021	(5) In London 2011-2015	(6) 2016-2021
Family support	-0.28*** (0.011)	-0.10*** (0.012)	-0.25** (0.010)	-0.07* (0.025)	-0.19*** (0.010)	-0.05** (0.011)
Social support	-0.01 (0.003)	-0.03 (0.002)	-0.01 (0.003)	-0.04 (0.003)	-0.02 (0.002)	-0.05 (0.105)
Health services	-0.08 (0.086)	-0.05 (0.114)	-0.10 (0.093)	-0.06 (0.082)	-0.13* (0.029)	-0.12* (0.026)
Media	-0.14 (0.003)	-0.39* (0.024)	-0.03 (0.003)	-0.16* (0.003)	-0.17* (0.019)	-0.39* (0.025)
School education	-0.15* (0.022)	-0.14* (0.021)	-0.18* (0.035)	-0.11* (0.022)	-0.19* (0.027)	-0.15* (0.045)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** and * indicate p<0.01, p<0.05 and p<0.1 respectively.

- Subgroup analysis shows consistent results in both phases.

Conclusions

- As the places where young people spend most their time, family and school play important roles to lower substance use among disadvantaged young people before 2016.
- After 2016, media such as internet and social media strongly influences the attitude of disadvantaged young people towards substance use, urging more online supports against drug misuse.
- After 2016, health services such as consultation and treatment start to take significant effects on reducing substance use among disadvantaged young people, indicating an achievement of the English healthcare system on anti-illicit drugs.