

Substance Use among Adolescents with and without a Migration Background: Does the Homophily in Social Ties Matter?

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Long Abstract

Adolescence is often characterised as a period during which risky behaviours increases sharply, with potential long-term effects not only on health and wellbeing, but also on educational attainment, morbidity and premature mortality. According to Fitzsimons (2018), in the UK, under half of adolescents have tried alcohol at least once and around one in ten have engaged in binge drinking, the proportion of regular smokers is just under 3% and around 6% of 14-years-old have tried to smoke cannabis. Although prior studies drawn attention to the substantial variations between ethnic groups in terms of substance use, they provide inconclusive results. Indeed, whereas some research has suggested that adolescents with a migration background were less likely to use drugs (Flavio Francisco Marsiglia et al., 2008; Molcho M et al.,2006), to smoke tobacco (Georgiades et al., 2006) and to consume alcohol (Brandom, 2008), some others have found the opposite (Brindis et al., 1995; Delforterie et al., 2014; Prado et al., 2009; Walsh et al., 2014).

However, whereas most of these studies explained ethnic differences in substances consumption mainly through cultural factors (Sarasa-Renedo et al., 2015; Amundsen, 2012), substantial little attention has been paid to structural determinants. Indeed, the use of the native/host language or social interactions, and the whole process of socio-cultural adaptation have been widely used to address the differences found between generations of migrants and natives (Amundsen, 2012; Amundse et al., 2005; Campisi et al., 2017) whereas the demographic composition of friendship social network has been less investigated even if most of the socio-cultural adaptation depend on social ties, especially during the adolescence when friends are frequently chosen on the base of similar characteristics (i.e. homophily). However, the relationship between homophily in social ties and risky behaviours might produce opposite results. On one hand, homophily might protect adolescents with a migration background from adopting risky behaviours by enforcing identity, cultural norms and traditional behaviours that facilitate trust and social interaction as well as by providing social support and help to decrease exposure to prejudice and racial discrimination (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2011). On the other hand, an homophilous ethnic composition of social ties might increases adolescent's probability to take risky behaviours as a result of social isolation and lack of integration.

Moreover, in Europe, few studies have focused on risk-taking behaviours amongst adolescents of mixed origins even if prior studies highlighted an higher risk of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis misuse amongst them (Sarasa-Renedo et al., 2015; van Tubergen et al, 2010). Indeed, the numbers of mixed race/ethnicity people is rapidly increasing in Europe (McCubbin, McCubbin, Samuels, Zhang, & Sievers, 2013; Rees, Wohland, Norman, & Boden, 2011) and existing studies suggests that mixed

ethnicity children are more likely to experience emotional, psychological and behavioral difficulties than their non-mixed minority counterparts (Nazroo et al., 2018). This increased risk is considered to be a consequence of struggles with identity formation and more limited connections with the cultural heritage of parents (Bratter & Eschbach, 2005; Cooney & Radina, 2000; Lorenzo-Blanco, Bares, & Delva, 2013; Root, 1992; Schlabach, 2013; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002; Udry et al., 2003). Therefore, according to Nazroo et al (2018) mixed ethnicity children may face the experience of being caught between two socially significant categories, being denied one, or the other, or both, so being thought of as having a less than 'authentic' racial/ethnic identity and, consequently, 'cultural homelessness' (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999).

In this paper, we examine whether homophily in social ties is associated with increases of health risky behaviours - namely, smoking cigarettes, alcohol consumption and cannabis use - amongst adolescents with and without a migration background, by distinguishing between mixed and mono-cultural origins and by also looking at differences amongst main ethnic groups living in the UK, such as asian and black.

We seek to contribute to prior research by using data drawn from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), a nationally representative cohort study of children born into 19,000 families between September 2000 and January 2002 in the UK. That database collected data on each child's household, providing detailed information on family structure, parenting, child behaviour, and cognitive development. The present study focuses on information collected when the child was fourteen years old.

Our preliminary results indicate that homophily decreased the probability to smoke cigarettes amongst adolescents with a mixed ethnic background of about 47 percentage points, whereas it more than doubled their probability to drink alcohol. However, when we distinguish among main ethnic groups, the association between homophily and risky behaviours partially change. Indeed, findings show that homophily significantly decreased the probability to smoke tobacco amongst mixed-black adolescents of about 52 percentage points and it significantly increased the probability to be a frequent alcohol consumer amongst millennials with a mixed-asian background as well as amongst pure-asian adolescents. Finally, adolescents with mixed-asian migration origin having a strongly homophilous social network were significantly more likely to regularly use cannabis compared with mixed-asian adolescents with an heterophilous social network.