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Substance Use and Delinquency Among Middle School Girls in Foster Care: A Three-Year Follow-up of a Randomized Controlled Trial

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Abstract

Objective—The present study evaluated the efficacy of the Middle School Success intervention (MSS) for reducing substance use and delinquency among girls in foster care, using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design. The program was designed to fill a service gap during the summer prior to the middle school transition and to prevent delinquency, substance use, and related problems.

Method—One hundred girls in foster care and their caregivers were randomly assigned either to the intervention ($n = 48$) or to a regular foster care control ($n = 52$) condition. The girls completed a baseline (T1) assessment and follow-up assessments at 6 months (T2), 12 months (T3), 24 months (T4), and 36 months (T5) postbaseline. Caregivers participated in assessments from T1 through T4. This study is a follow up to Smith et al. (2011)'s study, which examined immediate outcomes at T2.

Results—Girls in the intervention condition showed significantly lower levels of substance use than did girls in the control condition at 36-months postbaseline. The group difference was only marginally significant for delinquency. Further analyses indicated significant indirect effects of the intervention through increased prosocial behaviors which led to decreased internalizing and externalizing symptoms and then to lower levels of substance use. The direct effect of the intervention on substance use remained significant in the presence of the indirect effects. For delinquency, the intervention had positive effects mainly through increased prosocial skills.

Conclusions—Findings highlight the importance of providing preventive intervention services for early adolescent girls in foster care.

Keywords

foster care; girls; drug use; delinquency; adolescent; intervention

Adolescent girls in foster care are at high risk for a wide range of poor outcomes including drug use, delinquent behavior, poor school adjustment, and health risking sexual behavior (e.g., Courtney et al., 2005; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Leve & Chamberlain, 2007; Pecora et al., 2003). For instance, Cusick and Courtney (2007) found

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Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3

**United States. Congress. House.
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Table of Contents Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3

1. Understanding the eBook Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3

- User-Friendly Interface
- 4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 User Reviews and Ratings
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 Free and Paid eBooks
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 Public Domain eBooks
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 eBook Subscription Services
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 Compatibility with Devices
 - Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3 Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Interactive Elements Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3

8. Staying Engaged with Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Setting Reading Goals Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Substance Use And Delinquency Among Inner City Adolescent Males Urban Institute Report 90 3
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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