Substance using characteristics of social networks and DUI outcomes among DUI offenders

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Introduction

• Social support can improve outcomes for individuals with alcohol use problems and reduce the impact of depression on alcohol use (Kelley et al., 2017).
• However, for many DUI offenders, their social networks are inextricably linked with their substance use behaviors. Social network substance use is a known risk factor for alcohol-related problems and DUI severity (Bingham et al., 2007; McCutcheon et al., 2014).

Research Question

• Is the relationship between social support, social isolation, and outcomes among DUI offenders moderated by the substance using characteristics of DUI offenders’ social networks?

Methods

• We recruited 506 DUI offenders from first-time and repeat DUI programs in Massachusetts.
• At baseline and 6-month follow-up, participants completed the Computerized Assessment and Referral System (CARS), a mental health assessment tool adapted from the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (Kessler et al., 2004).
• Participants also provided information about social support, social isolation, peer substance use, and their own substance use behavior, DUI behavior, and medical and emotional problems at follow-up.
• Our final sample included 230 individuals who had complete data at baseline and follow-up.

Results

• Screening positive for lifetime or past year depression at baseline related to both baseline and follow-up feelings of social isolation.
• Social isolation at follow-up was associated with increased likelihood of emotional and medical problems, family conflict, drinking to intoxication, and experiencing alcohol or drug problems at follow-up.
• As the Figure shows, social support, measured at follow-up, reduced the relationship between depression and social isolation when an individual's social network was not substance-using.

Results (cont.)

• As the Table shows, when all variables were entered into the same model, social network substance use was a stronger predictor of DUI, drinking to intoxication, and alcohol use problems at follow-up than past year depression at baseline, social support at follow-up, or social isolation at baseline or follow-up.

Conclusions

• These results suggest that the substance using characteristics of DUI offenders’ social network are a strong risk factor for negative outcomes, even if that social network is supportive. DUI offenders might find themselves in a vulnerable position where they must distance themselves from past substance-using social networks, potentially resulting in decreased social support and increased social isolation. Interventions that help establish new social networks for these populations might be particularly important.

References


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