PII-7: A Grounded Theory Study of Substance Use Patterns among Homeless Youth

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Presentation Preference: Student poster submission

Abstract Categories:
The thematic areas: Child & Adolescent Health

Abstract:
Introduction: There are an estimated 1.6 to 2.8 million homeless youth living on the streets of the U.S. each day. These youth are confronted with physical, mental and substance use problems. The purpose of this study was to 1) identify previous experiences influencing homeless youth in their decision to use or not to use substances; 2) examine life situations of homeless youth through narratives and 3) discover a theory which explains the basic social process of substance use in homeless youth. The research questions were 1) What factors do homeless youth describe as influential in their substance use experiences? 2) How do homeless youth describe their experiences of entering, living within, and exiting the drug culture? 3) What are the basic social processes involved in the patterns of substance use by homeless youth? and 4) What central theme do homeless youth as a whole attribute to their substance use?

Method(s): A qualitative grounded theory methodology (GTM) was used to describe the basic social processes of substance use in the homeless youth population. By using GTM, the entire process was revealed and a theory was generated which explains the social situation from the homeless youth’s perspective. Participants were interviewed using IRB approved interview guides and the sessions were tape recorded.

Results: There were 13 participants in this study whose ages ranged from 18 - 21 years. The age range for onset of alcohol use was 10-18 years and illegal drug use 5-17 years. The youth reported the motive/reason for starting illegal drug use was “being cool”; gang initiation; depression; relaxation; and peer pressure. The findings revealed the core category, Using, which consisted of three phases and five categories. The results described the experiences of homeless youth and substance use and ultimately, The Washington Theory of Substance Use among Homeless Youth.
Discussion & Conclusions: The results of this study provide a foundation for further studies of substance use in homeless youth and contribute to the knowledge base of nursing, social science and medicine for prevention and treatment of substance use in homeless youth.

Abstract History:
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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