Time horizons and substance use among African American youths living in disadvantaged urban areas.

Transitional from adolescence to full-fledged adulthood is often challenging, and young people who live in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods face additional obstacles and experience disproportionately higher negative outcomes, including substance abuse and related risk behaviors. This study investigated whether substance use among African Americans ages 15 to 25 (M=18.86 years) living in such areas was related to present-dominated time perspectives and higher delay discounting. Participants (N=344, 110 males, 234 females) living in Deep South disadvantaged urban neighborhoods were recruited using Respondent Driven Sampling, an improved peer-referral sampling method suitable for accessing this hard-to-reach target group. Structured field interviews assessed alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use and risk/protective factors, including time perspectives (Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory [ZTPI]) and behavioral impulsivity (delay discounting task). As predicted, substance use was positively related to a greater ZTPI orientation toward present pleasure and a lower tendency to plan and achieve future goals. Although the sample as a whole showed high discounting of delayed rewards, discount rates did not predict substance use. The findings suggest that interventions to lengthen time perspectives and promote enriched views of future possible selves may prevent and reduce substance use among disadvantaged youths. Discontinuities among the discounting and time perspective variables in relation to substance use merit further investigation.

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