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TITLE:

Anxiety-specific influences on substance use: Evidence of a protective effect in adolescence and a risk factor in adulthood

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ABSTRACT:

Externalizing behavior is a strong risk factor for substance use, but the role of internalizing manifestations of distress, and anxiety in particular, in predicting substance use remains unclear. Studies have suggested that anxiety may be either a protective or risk factor for substance use. The present study aimed to clarify whether there is an anxiety-specific pathway to substance use, examining sex and age as potential moderators that may explain the conflicting results in the literature. Anxiety was differently associated with substance use in adolescents and adults and in girls/women and boys/men. After controlling for externalizing behavior and depression, anxiety was associated with reduced substance use in adolescent girls and increased substance use in adult women. In contrast, anxiety-specific influences on substance use were not significant in boys and men. Possible explanations for these contrasting results across development (such as harm avoidance and social isolation accompanying anxiety limiting

access to substances in adolescence) and sex (such as lower levels of anxiety in boys/men than in girls/women) are discussed.

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