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Self-perception of risk for developing substance use disorders

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ABSTRACT:

Risk perception, the perceived likelihood of experiencing a health-related outcome, is associated with a number of preventative and health-related behavioral outcomes including health care service use, uptake of screening, diet, and exercise. Perceived risk has been studied in relation to health outcomes such as cancer and diabetes, but little research has examined perceived risk as it relates to substance use disorders, including alcohol use disorder, nicotine use disorder, and cannabis use disorder, which are influenced by both genetic factors and environmental factors. We conducted a brief survey with participants recruited from a registry which enrolled cohorts of freshmen at an urban public university; 207 participants (76.2% female; 58.3% self-reported as White; Mean age = 24.48 years) completed the survey assessing self-perception of risk for developing substance use disorders (seven-point response scale from “no chance” to “certain to happen”) and factors that contribute to their risk perception. The percentage of participants who believed that they had at least a “moderately likely” chance of developing alcohol use disorder, nicotine use disorder, and cannabis use disorder was 34.3%, 20.3% and 23.9%, respectively. Additionally, 63.3% of the sample reported that their risk for developing alcohol use disorder was based on family history, while only 18.8% based their risk for cannabis use disorder on family history. We also examine the relationship between self-reported risk factors and risk perception, as well as substance use. These results can be used to inform prevention efforts, including educational resources surrounding the complex etiology of substance use disorders.

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