

Summary: SSBD (333605)

Drug-Related Information Seeking and Scanning from Media and Interpersonal Sources as an Indicator of Drug Use Risk: An Innovative Approach to Drug Use Prevention

Nonmedical drug use is a major public health concern in Europe. The SSBD project (Drug-Related Seeking and Scanning Behaviours) is the first of its kind to explore the role of active and passive forms of drug-related information engagement in shaping drug use trajectories among young adults. Building on research in health communication on Information Seeking and Scanning Behaviours (SSBD), the project aims to illustrate how active and passive forms of drug-related information acquisition can be used as individual-level indicators of drug initiation or escalation to habitual use to aid in drug prevention efforts.

The theoretical framework and the empirical analyses aim to achieve the following project objectives: (1) provide empirical evidence about the prevalence, determinants, and outcomes of drug-related seeking and scanning among two young adult populations during important transitions, (2) guide advances in the theoretical conceptualization of information seeking and scanning and its effects on risk behaviours, and (3) identify drug-related seeking and scanning behaviours as significant indicators of future drug behaviour. Furthermore, the project aims to identify aspects of media use, sources, and content which play a role in shaping drug-related perceptions and behaviours among young people, using a range of methods and focusing on different populations.

To achieve the aims of the research, the project made use of three studies. The first phase of the project involved the collection and analysis of qualitative data through in-depth interviews among university students. The second phase involved two quantitative studies in which online surveys were used to collect data among two populations of young adults. The first of these studies focused on a cross-sectional sample of 511 high school graduates, while the second study was a longitudinal survey of 805 first year university students (this cohort was surveyed at three time points, at 6-month intervals). All three studies (phases one and two) have been completed.

The qualitative analysis that the research team has conducted showed that information scanning and seeking about marijuana and amphetamines was common, particularly from peers and from the Internet. The analysis of in-depth interviews among university students identified themes related to information seeking behaviours, including cross-source information acquisition across

interpersonal and media sources, as well as motivations for engaging in information seeking efforts related to nonmedical drugs. As such, the SSBD project was the first to investigate dimensions of active information seeking efforts and passive information acquisition of drug-related information among young adults. These results provided an important foundation for the design of the principal measures of information seeking and scanning for the SSBD project, and have been published in *Communication Quarterly*.

The SSBD project was also the first project to construct and validate measures of information seeking in the context of nonmedical drug use. The comprehensive validation process used data collected through the SSBD project to provide evidence for convergent, discriminant, nomological and test-retest validity. Results offered evidence to support the use of these measures to assess information seeking in the context of drug use, as well as their application to other research contexts. The results have been published in *Communication Methods and Measures*.

In addition, the research team was also the first to test a cross-sectional model of proposed effects of information seeking on drug-related outcomes. The results showed direct associations between information seeking and (nonmedical) marijuana use intention among young adults in Israel and in the U.S. In addition, we found support for hypothesized indirect effects of seeking through changes in attitudes and perceived norms, which is consistent with the theoretical framework (the integrative model of behavioural prediction). These results have been published in the *International Journal of Communication*.

Finally, our research team conducted a cross-comparative study of topics about which information was sought among young adults in Israel and in the U.S. The study provided a detailed description of the most frequently searched topics, as well as the most popular, and most trusted, sources of drug-related information. These results offer practical implications for the design and evaluation of effective drug-prevention efforts among young adults.

The expected final results of the SSBD project will include longitudinal analyses of the effects of information seeking on drug use outcomes, including moderators and mediators of these effects as outlined in the theoretical model. Our results to date provide a sound empirical and theoretical basis for these effects, which will be tested using state-of-the-art structural equation modelling techniques (latent growth curve analysis). The SSBD project

- Together, the findings of this project provide compelling and novel evidence demonstrating effects of information engagement behaviours on attitudes and

intention relating to nonmedical drug use among young adults. In addition, the project findings offer an innovative contribution to theory and research in health communication and substance use prevention. The SSBD project has great potential social impact for the design and evaluation of prevention efforts to reduce nonmedical drug use. The results suggest that information seeking can be conceptualized as an indicator of substance use risk, and offer a validated measure of seeking in this context. Future research can apply the findings of the project to enhance the efficacy of substance use prevention efforts at the national and EU level, improving the health of young adults and other populations at risk of substance use.

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