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INTERACTION BETWEEN PERSONALITY, FAMILY, AND NEIGHBORHOOD FACTORS
IN SUBSTANCE USE INITIATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Aims: This project investigated longitudinal predictors of smoking, drinking and marijuana use initiation among adolescents.

Method: A community-representative sample of 440 mother-child dyads with equal gender, SES, and ethnic representation was assessed 4 times covering the span of more than 6 years.

Children's reports of age of first smoke, drink and marijuana use were collected as part of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) at T3.

Child-level predictors at T1 included child gender, race, and sensation seeking personality. Family-level predictors at T1 included maternal education, family income, and children's self-reports about exposure to home violence. Information regarding presence of drugs and gangs in schools/neighborhoods were collected from mothers and children at T1 and combined into a single measure.

To examine the timing of events - specifically, the time when children started smoking, drinking and using marijuana as a function of the above T1 predictors - three separate survival models were estimated using the Cox proportional hazards model.

Results: Controlling for all other predictors, the sensation-seeking temperament and neighborhood quality remained significant predictors of substance use initiation among adolescents across all three substances, such that children initiated these behaviors sooner if they were high sensation-seekers or came from dysfunctional neighborhoods. Significant person X environment interactions were also evident for smoking and marijuana use, such that neighborhood and family risks were especially potent risks among children with high sensation seeking temperaments. These results point to the importance of broader contextual influences on the negative outcomes such as substance use during adolescence.