



Factors Increasing Vulnerability... and Enhancing Resilience

In 2007, N-DAP commissioned The University of East Anglia to undertake an assessment of the characteristics, needs and harms associated with young people vulnerable to problematic substance misuse in Norfolk¹. The study argues that substance use amongst young people is determined by multiple inter-related factors and that it can be best understood via a risk, protection and resilience-focused approach.

Risk Factors

Risk factors can be internal or external to individuals and a wide range of different risk factors are associated with substance misuse by young people. Risk factors can be seen as markers of vulnerability to substance use, the influence of which is mediated or moderated by young people's own decisions regarding whether to initiate, maintain or cease drug use. Risk factors related to specific identifiable group memberships can be used to aid the targeting of interventions at high risk populations of young people.

The study identified several groups of young people who are vulnerable to substance misuse. These include young people who:

- are homeless and/or 'runaways'
- are engaged in offending behaviour
- are engaged or being inducted into sex work
- who have been 'Looked After' by the local authority
- live with parents and/or siblings who are substance misusers
- truant from school or who have been excluded
- are experiencing mental health problems

Young people who belong to more than one of the groups listed above are most highly vulnerable to substance use.

Members of refugee groups and asylum seekers to the UK may also comprise such a group but there is insufficient data available on this population. Very little information is available on young Gypsies and Travellers.

Protective Factors

Protective factors can increase a young person's resilience to the development of drug misuse problems. The Substance of Young Needs² identified the following:

- a positive temperament
- intellectual ability
- consistent parent-child discipline
- a positive adult relationship
- affiliation with like-minded peers
- links with pro-social values and institutions

Resilience

Many young people who are vulnerable to substance misuse exhibit resilience. This resilience is the result of a complex interplay of factors which can be usefully represented as three inter-related thinking styles and behaviours, namely:

- the view that 'drugs are not for me'
- the view that drugs are incompatible with personal goals, and
- having interpersonal skills and ability to resist.

¹ Scaife, V. and O'Brien M. *Norfolk Young People's Needs Assessment 2007* (N-DAP: 2007)

² Health Advisory Service *The Substance of Young Needs* (Health Advisory Service: 2001)