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Peer Influences: The Impact of Online and Offline Friendship Networks on Adolescent Smoking and Alcohol Use.

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Source

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Abstract

PURPOSE:

Online social networking sites (SNSs) have become a popular mode of communication among adolescents. However, little is known about the effects of social online activity on health behaviors. The authors examined the use of SNSs among friends and the degree to which SNS activities relate to face-to-face peer influences and adolescent risk behaviors.

METHODS:

Longitudinal egocentric friendship network data along with adolescent social media use and risk behaviors were collected from 1,563 10th-grade students across five Southern California high schools. Measures of online and offline peer influences were computed and assessed using fixed-effects models.

RESULTS:

The frequency of adolescent SNS use and the number of their closest friends on the same SNSs were not significantly associated with risk behaviors. However, exposure to friends' online pictures of partying or drinking was significantly associated with both smoking ($\beta = .11$, $p < .001$) and alcohol use ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$). Whereas adolescents with drinking friends had higher risk levels for drinking, adolescents without drinking friends were more likely to be affected by higher exposure to risky online pictures ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .05$). Myspace and Facebook had demographically distinct user characteristics and differential effects on risk behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS:

Exposure to risky online content had a direct impact on adolescents' risk behaviors and significantly interacted with risk behaviors of their friends. These results provide evidence that friends' online behaviors should be

considered a viable source of peer influence and that increased efforts should focus on educating adolescents on the negative effects of risky online displays.

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KEYWORDS:

Adolescent, Adolescent drinking, Alcohol drinking, Friends, Peer influence, Smoking, Social media, Social network analysis

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