Synthesis Paper

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# Introduction

Underage drinking is a serious social issue that affects individuals, families, and society. In many countries, including the United States, alcohol consumption among adolescents remains a significant concern, largely due to its negative impacts on public health, safety, and the future of someone’s physical and psychological development and well-being (Özdemir & Koutakis, 2016). In addition, underage drinking is linked not only to poor academic performance and increased engagement in risky behaviors, such as drug use and unsafe driving, but also serves the future of substance abuse issues, criminal activities, and mental health disorders (Harding, 2016).

.Despite the awareness campaigns, educational programs, and preventive measures that youth are exposed to, underage drinking remains a concern that requires more attention and intervention.

The social and environmental factors that influencing adolescent development and behavior are already complex but become even more so when alcohol is involved. Understanding why some adolescents engage in risky behaviors like alcohol consumption while others do not is important for developing more effective prevention strategies (Harding, 2016).

One theoretical framework that offers valuable insights into underage drinking is Social Control Theory. Developed by sociologist Travis Hirschi in 1969, this theory suggests that individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors when they have strong social bonds to regular institutions, such as family, school, and community (Black, 1983). According to Social Control Theory, the absence of these bonds or weakened ties results in higher vulnerability to delinquency and deviance, including underage drinking. Hirschi’s theory is vital for understanding why some adolescents, especially those with weaker family ties or social connections, are more inclined to engage in underage drinking and other risky behaviors.

Social Control Theory shows that preventing deviant behavior comes from supportive and strong relationships with those around an individual. Concerning underage drinking, adolescents who maintain close, supportive ties with their parents and peers are less likely to consume alcohol (Özdemir & Koutakis, 2016). When adolescents feel abandoned or disconnected, they may engage in risky or attention-seeking behaviors. Adolescents who have weak attachments to their parents are more likely to experiment with alcohol at an early age (Johnson, 2016). In addition, young people who associate with peers who drink are more likely to adopt similar practices (Harding, 2016), and therefore, parents and peers can influence youths' decisions to drink. And strengthening these bonds can reduce alcohol consumption among adolescents (Johnson, 2016).

Social control theory suggests that enhancing the strength of these social bonds can act as a protective factor against underage drinking, reducing the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risky behaviors.

Taking into consideration that there is a relationship between underage drinking and social bonds, this paper will examine the issue from the lens of social control theory. What follows is a discussion of research on underage drinking, as well as an overview of current policies and practices that aim to prevent and alleviate underage drinking and increase social bonds.programs to keep alcohol consumption away among these young individuals.