Reviewer’s report

Title: Exploring Racial/Ethnic Differences in Substance Use: A Theory-Based Investigation with a Sample of Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth

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Reviewer: Nicholas Ialongo

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The authors indicate that they conducted a theory-based investigation of racial/ethnic differences in substance use among a sample of juvenile justice-involved youth. In the abstract they mention the potential for understanding long term health outcomes of juvenile justice youth and the development of preventive interventions.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Unfortunately, the authors never elaborate in more than a sentence the theoretical basis for their study.

2. Nor is any data presented on long-term outcomes or are the implications for preventive intervention strategies elucidated by these data.

3. The sample is also problematic in terms of its size as well as how it was drawn. Regarding the former, a sample size of 651 seems limited when one wants to study racial/ethnic differences where one is expecting over representation of minority populations. For example, only 15% of the sample was Caucasian. Nothing is said about the number of available probation offices contacted, their geographic distribution throughout the state, and the number and characteristics of those who agreed to participate versus those who did not. This goes to the question of how representative the sample of probation offices was. It is also not clear what proportion of youth contacted actually participated.

4. Besides the above concerns, the authors did not clarify how the measures were administered. Were the youth simply given the measures to complete on their regardless of reading level or were they interviewed and if so was the interview conducted using methods sensitive to the issue of the reluctance of the participant to report illicit behavior?

5. Also, unclear was whether the probation office was taken into account in analyzing the data. That is, youth were nested within probation office and, as such, this nesting needs to be taken into account in the analyses.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests' below