Abstract

Purpose: During adolescence, emotions are heightened, and impulsivities are more difficult to resist. This inability to self-regulate puts individuals at higher risk for preventable manners of childhood and adolescent mortality, including suicide, addiction, and subsequent substance abuse. The first step to understanding how adolescents self-control can be improved is by asking the critical question of: are adolescents impacted by their ability to self-regulate?

Methods: 70 adolescents were recruited to perform two tasks:
1) Participants filled out a survey asking them to rate how much self-control they showed in different situations.
2) Participants were visited by an in-person task where each individual was offered a small reward that they could receive immediately or a larger reward (low-quality chocolate) that was more difficult to resist. The tasks were divided into five categories below to analyze the correlation between each category and participants' decisions.

Results: An analysis of the decision participants made in the intertemporal choice task (i.e., choosing the immediate gratification versus choosing the delayed gratification) was compared to the results of participants in the survey to determine whether an adolescent's ability to self-regulate could be predicted. Results demonstrated that there was no significant correlation between self-report score and the participant's decision, demonstrating that the participants possessed an accurate perception of their self-control.

Conclusion: Improving self-control among adolescents is critical in the long fight to prevent substance abuse and suicide. Because this research demonstrates that adolescents may be unable to predict their own failure to self-regulate, a greater focus needs to be placed on identifying adolescents determined to be at higher risk for addictive behaviors and ensuring said adolescents are involved in programs that aid in development of greater self-control.

Methodology

1) Target Population: A convenience sample of 70 participants with ages ranging from 15-18 years participated in the study
2) Data Collection: A Likert scale survey with 26 questions required participants rate how much they agreed with statements pertaining to their self-control (e.g., Rate how closely the statement applies to you: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).
3) Sharing of data: An assortment of graphics, charts, quantitative/statistical data as well as descriptive data was included.
4) Data Analysis: Each participant’s self-reported control scores from the survey was analyzed using a Pearson correlation coefficient. The intertemporal choice task was completed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Significant differences were determined if participants self-assessed their level of self-control or in other words, that they believed they could resist temptations performed accordingly and resisted the immediate gratification in the task.

Results

The results of the intertemporal choice task produced three categories: participants who finished the test, participants who did not complete within the five minutes, and participants who quit and received the smaller chocolate. Figure 2 displays that 9 participants finished the test, 25 did not finish, and 36 participants discontinued their attempts. Figure 2 also displays that 40 participants received the difficult English test to complete within the given time while 30 participants received the difficult math test. This quantitative data was later used to determine correlations and trends between participants in each category. These results are important as it could be perceived that participants who finished did not possess an accurate perception of the amount of self-control they had.

Significance of Research Question and Results: The question of how adolescents are impacted by self-control is a vital to determining the necessary and most effective steps that can be taken to aid adolescents in improving self-control, a trait that has proven to be crucial for success in an individual's future. If participants were accurate in their belief of how much self-control they possessed, the next step would be for adolescents identified to have low self-control and thus at a higher risk for addictive behaviors to be monitored and involved in programs that prevented youth from future addictive activities including suicide and substance abuse. However, as adolescents failed to self-assess self-control, the following steps are required:

1) Development of an accurate predictor of self-control: Since adolescents themselves are unable to predict their level of self-control, further research is needed to allow for early detection of individuals at risk for addictive behaviors.
2) A greater focus on environments that control their impulses and subsequently attempt detrimental substances.
3) Programing for addictive behaviors are most useful.

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References


