treatment unless clients are assisted to deal with their feelings of guilt (Ehrmin, 2001). Questions to help identify psychological dimension influences on substance abuse in the community are included in the focused assessment below.

Sociocultural Considerations

Factors in the sociocultural dimension may also contribute to problems of substance abuse. These factors can exist within the family unit, one’s peer group, or society at large. Within the family, lower rates of binge drinking among adolescents (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson, 2005). Similarly, family cohesion, high levels of conflict, few shared interests and activities, poor coping strategies, and marital dissatisfaction increase the risk of substance abuse in their members. Families who encounter multiple stressors and have inadequate resources are also at risk. Episodes of violence within the family can also lead family members to abuse substances as a means of escape from family tensions. Good parent–child communication, maternal use of reasoning with children, and adequate supervision of children, on the other hand, have been associated with lower rates of binge drinking among adolescents (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson, 2005). Similarly, family cohesion, family involvement in religious activities, and the mother’s negative attitude toward substance use by minors are associated with negative attitudes toward substance abuse among adolescents (Pilgrim, Abbey, & Kershaw, 2004). Conversely, excessive unsupervised free time has been associated with initial use of drugs by adolescents (Al-Kandari, Yacoub, & Omu, 2001). Community health nurses should assess families for conditions that may contribute to substance abuse by family members.

Peer influence is another factor in the social environment that may contribute to substance abuse. In adolescents and preadolescents in particular, pressure from peers to smoke, drink, or use other psychoactive drugs is a powerful motivator for initiating these behaviors. In working with young people, in particular, the nurse carefully assesses peer attitudes toward substance use and abuse as well as the degree to which the individual feels a need to conform to peer-dictated norms.

Social factors such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination may create a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that leads to substance abuse as an escape or to enhance one’s own feelings of competence. These factors might explain the higher prevalence of some forms of substance abuse among members of minority groups and the poor. For example, neighborhoods with large percentages of minority residents and low education levels have been associated with adolescent initiation of injection drug use. No similar association was found for Whites in neighborhoods with low percentages of minority residents and high education levels (Fuller et al., 2005).

Some sociocultural factors that might be considered positive may also contribute to drug use. For example, higher alcohol consumption rates are found among employed people with higher incomes and higher educational levels and among smokers in the United States, suggesting that the ability to afford alcohol has an influence on the extent of consumption (Moore et al., 2005). At least in part, however, differing patterns of excessive alcohol consumption were noted in the Netherlands, where people with lower education levels were more likely to initiate excessive alcohol consumption than those with higher education levels. The authors explained their findings by association with exposure to financial stressors and low social support that accompanied lower education levels (Droomers, Schrijvers, & Mackenbach, 2004).

Societal attitudes toward drug use and abuse also influence the extent of substance abuse in the population. For example, attitudes that promote incarceration rather than treatment are not only ineffective but more costly than substance abuse treatment (Drug Reform Coordination Network, 2005). Societal action to restrict access to drugs, on the other hand, may be more effective. For example, increasing the minimum legal drinking age has decreased motor vehicle accident fatalities among adolescents. Ease of access to drugs and alcohol, on the other hand, increases the potential for substance abuse. In one study in New Hampshire, for example, 30% of adolescent attempts to purchase alcohol were successful (Division of Adult and Community Health, 2004). The ready availability of amphetamines in southern California, where methamphetamine labs abound, make this a drug of choice in the area and increase its abuse relative to other psychoactive substances.