



Just like your father? The role of communication and parent drinking during adolescence in predicting substance use during emerging adulthood



Emily Simpson¹, Kaitlin M. Flannery², Anne Thompson Heller¹, Beth S. Russell¹, & Christine McCauley Ohannessian³
The University of Connecticut 1. Human Development & Family Studies; 2. Psychological Sciences; 3. School of Medicine

INTRODUCTION

- Although the factors that contribute to youth substance use may be complex and varied, family communication may serve as an important protective factor (Fosco, Caruthers, & Dishion, 2012; Velleman, Templeton, & Copello, 2005).
- Previous research suggests that poor family communication is associated with both higher rates of adolescent substance use and mental health concerns, and that communication frequency and quality may act as protective factors against substance use (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Luk, Farhat, Iannotti & Simons-Morton, 2010; Ohannessian, 2013).
- Given that parental drinking may have a destabilizing effect on healthy adolescent adjustment, researchers have posited that the protective effects of communication may be especially salient in the context of parental drinking (Ohannessian, 2013).
- The extent to which parental communication factors may continue to influence substance use into emerging adulthood may have important implications for understanding the experiences of the emerging adult.

MEASURES CONTINUED

- Parent and adolescent communication was measured using the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) (Barnes & Olsen, 1982). The PACS is a 20-item measure that assesses communication between an adolescent and his/her mother and father. The PACS has two subscales; open communication and problem communication. Example items included “My mother is a good listener” and “There are topics I avoid discussing with my mother.” The subscales used in this study had strong reliability: mother-adolescent open communication (alpha .93), adolescent-mother problem communication (alpha .82), father-adolescent open communication (alpha .94), and the father-child problem communication (alpha .83).
- Adolescent substance use was measured using a secondary substance use survey in which participants were asked to report how often they had used cigarettes, marijuana, sedatives, stimulants, inhalants, hallucinogens, cocaine or crack, and opiates, over the past six months. Responses ranged from 0 (no use) to 7 (everyday). A total score was calculated by summing the scores of the substances (Ohannessian, 2009).

RESULTS

- Longitudinal regression analyses were used to predict total drug use in emerging adults at Time 2.
- Parent problem drinking and adolescent-parent communication variables from Time 1 were entered in the first step of the hierarchical analyses, followed by the parental problem drinking x communication interaction in step 2.
- Because prior research has demonstrated that both the gender of the parent and the gender of the adolescent should be considered when predicting substance use (Ohannessian, 2013), the regression analyses were run separately by gender.
- As shown in Table 1, results suggest that for male participants, father problem drinking and adolescent-father open communication explained a significant amount of the variance in reported drug use.
- For females, the interaction between father problem drinking and adolescent-father problem communication was a significant predictor of drug use.

HYPOTHESES

H1: We hypothesized that parent drinking during adolescence would positively predict substance use in emerging adulthood.

H2: We also predicted that parent-adolescent communication would moderate the relationship between parent drinking and emerging adult substance use.

REGRESSION ANALYSES

Table 1. Regression Coefficients for the Models Predicting Substance Use

Independent Variables	Males			Females		
	B	R ²	Δ R ²	B	R ²	Δ R ²
Models for Mother						
<i>Step 1</i>						
Adolescent-Mother Open Communication	-.30	.13		-.19	.08	
Maternal Problem Drinking	.21			-.23 [†]		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Adolescent-Mother Open Communication	-.37*	.18	.05	-.18	.08	.00
Maternal Problem Drinking	.14			-.22		
Open Communication X Problem Drinking	-.24			.04		
<i>Step 1</i>						
Adolescent-Mother Problem Communication	.30 [†]	.12		.08	.06	
Maternal Problem Drinking	.15			-.23		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Adolescent-Mother Problem Communication	.31 [†]	.13	.01	-.10	.12	.06 [†]
Maternal Problem Drinking	.14			.14		
Problem Communication X Problem Drinking	.08			-.47 [†]		
Models for Father						
<i>Step 1</i>						
Adolescent-Father Open Communication	-.30 [†]	.19*		-.02	.03	
Paternal Problem Drinking	.30 [†]			.16		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Adolescent-Father Open Communication	-.23	.23	.04	-.05	.08	.05
Paternal Problem Drinking	.33 [†]			-.04		
Open Communication X Problem Drinking	.22			-.30		
<i>Step 1</i>						
Adolescent-Father Problem Communication	-.11	.07		.20	.06	
Paternal Problem Drinking	.25			.11		
<i>Step 2</i>						
Adolescent-Father Problem Communication	-.12	.08	.01	.27 [†]	.14	.08*
Paternal Problem Drinking	.27			-.13		
Problem Communication X Problem Drinking	-.08			.36*		

Note: [†]p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

PARTICIPANTS AND MEASURES

- Sample:**
- Participants (N=88, 62% female) were selected from a larger longitudinal study (Adolescent Adjustment Project; Ohannessian, 2009).
 - This study examined data from 2008 (Time 1; Mean age=17.18, SD=1.12), and 2009 (Time 2; Mean age=17.98, SD=1.37).
 - Students all were enrolled in public high schools in the Mid-Atlantic States at Time 1, but some of the participants had graduated from high school while others were still enrolled as seniors at Time 2.

- Measures:**
- A revised version of the Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (F-SMAST/M-SMAST; Crews & Sher, 1992), an eleven-item questionnaire, was used to assess problem drinking in both fathers and mothers, reported by the adolescent. Example items include “Has your mother’s/female guardian’s drinking ever created problems between her and your father (or step-father) or another relative” and “Has your father/male guardian ever gone to anyone for help about his drinking?” The M-SMAST had an alpha of .86 and the F-SMAST had an alpha of .87, indicating good reliability.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Open communication facilitates trust and security, as well as a positive and warm exchange of ideas between parent and adolescent, allowing the dyad to address concerns or issues such as substance use in a healthy way.
- For girls, only the interaction between paternal problem drinking and father problem communication was a significant predictor of emerging adult substance use. Problem communication, marked by conflict or negative feelings such as hostility, prevents adolescent girls from engaging in the sort of warm, open conversation needed to address issues such as substance use. Furthermore, paternal problem drinking impairs modeling healthy behaviors around substance use and predicts more permissive attitudes towards adolescent substance use (van der Zwaluw, 2008).
- Given that research also suggests adolescent girls may report greater difficulty in talking to fathers than boys, intervention efforts in ameliorating cross-gendered father-daughter problem communication and addressing paternal problem drinking may prove promising in substance use prevention (Luk et al., 2010). However, in order to maximize effectiveness, family based intervention efforts should target children sooner, not only before parent influence begins to wane in emerging adulthood but also even before substance use initiation in the early adolescent or late childhood years (DeWitt et al., 2014).

REFERENCES

Barnes, H., & Olson, D. H. (1982). Parent-adolescent communication. In D. H. Olson, H. McCubbin, H. Barnes, A. Larsen, M. Muxen, & W. Wilson (Eds.), *Family Inventories* (pp. 55-70). St Paul: University of Minnesota.

Chan, G. C., Kelly, A. B., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2013). Accounting for the association of family conflict and heavy alcohol use among adolescent girls: The role of depressed mood. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 74(3), 396-401.

Crews, T. M., & Sher, K. J. (1992). Using adapted short MASTs for assessing parental alcoholism: Reliability and validity. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 16(3), 576-584.

Davies, P. T., & Lindsay, L. L. (2004). Interparental conflict and adolescent adjustment: Why does gender moderate early adolescent vulnerability? *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(1), 160-168.

DeWitt, D. J., Adlaf, E. M., Offord, D. R., & Ogborne, A. C. (2014). Age at first alcohol use: a risk factor for the development of alcohol disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 171(11), 1200-1206.

Fosco, G. M., Caruthers, A. S., & Dishion, T. J. (2012). A Six-Year Predictive Test of Adolescent Family Relationship Quality and Effortful Control Pathways to Emerging Adult Social and Emotional Health. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(4), 565-575.

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 64-105.

Luk, J. W., Farhat, T., Iannotti, R. J., & Simons-Morton, B. G. (2010). Parent-child communication and substance use among adolescents: Do father and mother communication play a different role for sons and daughters? *Developmental Psychology*, 46(3), 426-431.

Ohannessian, C. M. (2009). Media use and adolescent psychological adjustment: An examination of gender differences. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 18(5), 582-593.

Ohannessian, C. M. (2013). Parental Problem Drinking and Adolescent Psychological Problems: The Moderating Effect of Adolescent-Parent Communication. *Youth & Society*, 45(1), 3-26.

van der Zwaluw, C. S., Scholte, R. H., Vermulst, A. A., Buitelaar, J. K., Verkes, R. J., & Engels, R. C. (2008). Parental problem drinking, parenting, and adolescent alcohol use. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 31(3), 189-200.

Velleman, R. D., Templeton, L. J., & Copello, A. G. (2005). The role of the family in preventing and intervening with substance use and misuse: a comprehensive review of family interventions, with a focus on young people. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 24(2), 93-109.

Supported by NIAAA K01AA015059

To obtain a copy of this poster, please visit www.adolescentadjustmentproject.org