

# Parental Restriction of Mature-rated Media and Its Association With Substance Use Among Argentinean Adolescents



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## ABSTRACT

**OBJECTIVE:** To assess the independent relation between parental restrictions on mature-rated media (M-RM) and substance use among South American adolescents.

**METHODS:** Cross-sectional school-based youth survey of 3,172 students (mean age, 12.8 years; 57.6% boys) in 3 large Argentinean cities. The anonymous survey queried tobacco, alcohol, and drug use using items adapted from global youth surveys. Adolescents reported M-RM restriction for internet and video game use, television programming, and movies rated for adults. Multivariate logistic regression models were used to assess the association between parental M-RM restriction and substance use after adjustment for hourly media use, measures of authoritative parenting style, sociodemographic characteristics, and sensation-seeking.

**RESULTS:** Substance use rates were 10% for current smoking, 32% for current drinking alcohol, 17% for past 30-day binge drinking, and 8% for illicit drug use (marijuana or cocaine). Half of the respondents reported parental M-RM restriction (internet 52%, TV 43%, adult movies 34%, video game 25%).

Parental M-RM restriction was only modestly correlated with authoritative parenting measures. In multivariate analyses M-RM restriction on all 4 venues was strongly protective for all substance use outcomes. Compared with no restriction, odds ratios for substance use for full restrictions were 0.32 (0.18–0.59), 0.53 (0.38–0.07), 0.36 (0.22–0.59), and 0.49 (0.26–0.92) for current smoking, drinking, binge drinking, and illicit drug use, respectively. The most important single M-RM venue was movies.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Results of this study confirmed the protective association between parental M-RM restriction during adolescence and multiple substance use outcomes, including illicit drugs. M-RM restriction is independent of traditional parenting measures. The preponderance of the evidence supports intervention development.

**KEYWORDS:** alcohol; drugs; media; parenting; prevention; tobacco; youth

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## WHAT'S NEW

Results of this study suggest a protective association between parental mature-rated media restriction during adolescence and substance use in Latin America. These data extend the knowledge of mature-rated media to South American youth and support the role of media-specific parenting to prevent substance use.

EVIDENCE IS ACCUMULATING that exposure to mature-rated media (M-RM) has a profound influence on the

behavior of children and adolescents, and that parental restriction of these exposures is an effective and appropriate addition to generally accepted areas of parenting (eg, authoritative parenting).<sup>1</sup> The evidence links exposure of M-RM to many outcomes. Cross-sectional<sup>2</sup> and prospective studies<sup>3,4</sup> have shown that exposure to R-rated movies affects substance use, in part through exposure to depictions of risk behaviors in these movies, but also by affecting trajectories of risk-taking personality traits like sensation-seeking.<sup>5–7</sup> Moreover, prospective studies suggest that playing mature-rated risk-glorifying video games predicts not only increased risk for aggression, but

also use of multiple substances<sup>8,9</sup> and risky driving.<sup>10</sup> Other studies address the relation between access to M-RM and poor school function.<sup>11</sup> The accumulating evidence indicates that the effects of M-RM exposures might exceed simple social cognitive influences by enhancing risk-taking personality characteristics and general deviance.

These findings raise the possibility for prevention interventions to motivate and assist parents in limiting exposure to M-RM during late childhood and early adolescence, starting before the child accumulates exposure to these influences. All available evidence suggests that M-RM exposure is widespread and begins during early adolescence.<sup>3,10</sup> The best documented evidence for a prevention effect for parental M-RM restriction is for viewing mature-rated movies. The 2012 Surgeon General's report<sup>12</sup> on smoking in adolescents and young adults included a meta-analysis of cross-sectional and prospective studies for adolescent smoking. After adjustment for a variety of confounding influences—including authoritative parenting style—parental restrictions of mature-rated movies were associated with markedly lower rates of smoking. The parental M-RM–smoking associations were mediated, in part, through less exposure to movie smoking.<sup>4</sup> One more recent study of Scottish adolescents combined movie and television restriction into an index and found an independent protective association with smoking<sup>13</sup>; in that study there was no association between internet restriction and smoking. In other studies it was found that parental movie restrictions were associated with lower rates of alcohol use and binge drinking.<sup>3,14,15</sup> In one study,<sup>15</sup> latent constructs of parental movie restriction were modeled separately from a general parenting construct, with movie restriction effects on behavior shown to be mediated through less exposure to R-rated movies.

No study to our knowledge has been conducted to assess media parenting in Latin American adolescents. In Argentina movies are evaluated and rated by the government through an Evaluation Committee in the National Institute of Movies and Audiovisual Arts. The evaluation Committee includes psychologists, lawyers, journalists, teachers, and experts in communication. They rate films according to their subjective cultural norms without any formal code or framework. Movies are rated in 4 categories: ATP (general audiences) may contain mild violence, language, and mature situations; ages 13 and older may contain moderate violence, mild sexual content, and mature situations; ages 16 and older may contain stronger violence, sex, and coarse language; and 18 and older movies are those with strong violence, sex, and coarse language. Results of previous studies suggest that movie rating systems in Argentina are more liberal in their treatment of sexual content, drug use, and violence compared with the US rating system.<sup>16</sup> The present study was conducted to extend this research by testing the association between substance use and parental rules regarding the internet, video games, television, and movies in the middle income population of Argentina, which, to our knowledge, is the first study to address this topic in Latin

America. Additionally, for the first time to our knowledge, we extend our outcomes beyond tobacco and alcohol to include illicit substance use. As with other previous studies, we examined the relation of M-RM parenting to the authoritative parenting construct, this time surveyed for mothers and fathers, to confirm the relative independence of media parenting from this more traditional parenting construct.

## METHODS

### STUDY SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

A convenience sample of 33 schools from 3 large cities in Argentina (Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Tucumán) participated in the study ( $n = 15, 8,$  and  $10$ , respectively), with public schools identified by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education ( $n = 18$ ) and private schools identified through personal contacts ( $n = 15$ ). At the time of the survey there were 916 schools in the 3 cities, 492 in Buenos Aires, 282 in Cordoba, and 142 in Tucuman; 13 schools were selected because they had participated in the Global Youth Tobacco Survey in 2007 and for this survey schools were randomly selected from across the country, then the sample was expanded using a “snow ball” strategy. Private schools were included in the sample because 26% of students attend these schools in Argentina. The survey was self-administered in eighth-grade classrooms between May and June of 2014. Passive consent was requested from parents or caretakers, and students signed an active consent form to allow follow-up contact for subsequent surveys. Students were assured that their individual data would not be seen by parents or school staff. The questionnaire used anonymous link procedures to allow for follow-up. The research protocol was approved by a National Institutes of Health-certified human subjects research board in Buenos Aires based at Centro de Educacion Medica e Investigaciones Clinicas.

### DEVELOPMENT OF QUESTIONNAIRE MEASURES

This report is part of a larger study that aims to assist researchers in middle-income Latin American countries in assessment of media exposure and their association with adolescent risk behaviors in adolescents who reside there. As part of that study, we wished to also examine media parenting and its relation to authoritative parenting and risk behaviors. The study questionnaire included a range of items on media use, tobacco, and alcohol marketing exposures, social influences, and perceptions and use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, most of which had been used in surveys for adolescents previously implemented in Argentina, Mexico, and in the United States.<sup>17–19</sup> Items in English were translated and reviewed by Argentinean Spanish-speaking research staff and pilot tested with students in Buenos Aires to evaluate students' understanding of questions, instructions, and confidentiality statements.

The self-administered questionnaires were completed by all of the students who accepted to participate in the classroom under the supervision of trained research staff. Survey completion took approximately 45 minutes, after

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