



Original article

Impulsive Personality, Parental Monitoring, and Alcohol Outcomes
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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: We examined the time-varying effects of sensation seeking, lack of perseverance, and parental monitoring on heavy drinking and alcohol-related harms from ages 16 to 28 years.**Methods:** Participants were from the Victoria Healthy Youth Survey, followed six times, biennially, between 2003 and 2013 (N = 662; mean age at Time 1 = 15.52, range = 12–18). Analyses used time-varying effect models, which estimate how the association between a predictor and an outcome differs over time without assuming the association follows a parametric function of time.**Results:** Sensation seeking was a stable risk factor for heavy drinking, and lack of perseverance was stable risk factor for alcohol-related harms at each age. Parental monitoring was associated with lower rates of heavy drinking in adolescence and lower rates of alcohol harm until the age of 24 years. Moreover, high levels of parental monitoring moderated the association between personality traits and rates of harm at ages 17–20 years but only for youth high on lack of perseverance and low on sensation seeking.**Conclusions:** The results provide a better understanding of age-related changes in risk and protective factors of alcohol use across the transition to adulthood. Impulsive personality traits are stable risk factors for alcohol outcomes until the late-20s despite typical age-related declines in these traits and drinking. Moreover, parental monitoring buffers the association between personality traits and alcohol harm for specific youth during the transition to adulthood. Personality-targeted interventions may be effective beyond adolescence, and parenting interventions may help reduce harm among low perseverance, low sensation-seeking youth.

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IMPLICATIONS AND
CONTRIBUTION

This study showed long-term stable associations between sensation seeking, lack of perseverance, and alcohol outcomes. However, parental monitoring moderated this association for particular youth. Findings suggest that personality-targeted intervention may be effective in young adulthood and that parental intervention could have added value for youth with specific personality traits.

Youth between ages 15 and 25 years have the highest levels of alcohol use and related problems [1]. Problem behavior theory posits that vulnerability to heavy alcohol use and associated problems are related to the confluence of individual level factors, such as personality, and environmental factors, such as parental influence [2]. Research independently shows that alcohol

outcomes are strongly associated with both impulsivity-related personality traits [3–6] and low parental monitoring [7,8] in adolescence and young adulthood. However, the potential buffering effect of parental monitoring on the association between impulsive personality traits and alcohol outcomes has rarely been examined [9].

Moreover, impulsivity-related personality traits, parental monitoring, and alcohol outcomes are dynamic. Historically, personality traits were thought to be relatively stable [10], but research suggests that these constructs change over time [4,6,11,12]. Specifically, sensation seeking and impulsivity tend to

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peak during early-mid adolescence, then level off or decline [12,13]. Parent monitoring declines with age as youth gain independence [14], and drinking increases on average until the age of 21 years and then declines [15,16]. Despite developmental shifts in these constructs, research has not examined how the associations between these constructs shift with age. Identifying windows of time in which these risk and protective factors are most salient will assist in the development and implementation of targeted interventions.

The present study addresses these previous limitations by using logistic time-varying effect models (TVEM) [17] to estimate the time-varying independent and combined associations of two dimensions of impulsivity, sensation seeking and lack of perseverance, and parental monitoring with heavy episodic drinking (HED) and alcohol-related problems from ages 16 to 28 years. TVEM is a nonparametric model that allows associations between variables to be flexibly estimated over time [17]. Recent work using TVEM determined substance use and depression was most strongly linked to having multiple sexual partners between ages 14 and 32 years, and that associations became weaker with age [18]. In this study, TVEM will enable more accurate identification of age periods in which impulsive personality traits and parental monitoring have the greatest influence on alcohol outcomes and identify the presence of age-specific moderating effects of parental monitoring.

Impulsivity and alcohol

Impulsivity is a multidimensional construct with related, but distinct dimensions including the following: (1) sensation seeking, desire for novel, intense, and varied experiences [13]; (2) lack of planning, acting without thinking; (3) lack of perseverance, tendency not to finish tasks; and (4) urgency, tendency to act rashly in response to positive or negative emotions [19]. Recent meta-analysis showed each dimension of impulsivity was associated with alcohol use and related problems, concurrently and prospectively during adolescence and young adulthood [3]. However, the magnitude of associations varies across dimensions. For example, sensation seeking has the largest association with general use and heavy drinking [3,4,20]. Lack of perseverance has the largest association with quantity [20] and is also associated with alcohol-related problems [21]. Urgency and lack of planning are most strongly associated with problematic consumption and dependence [20–22]. Emerging research suggests that personality-targeted interventions hold significant promise for reducing drinking behavior in adolescence [23]. However, few studies have examined associations between personality traits and alcohol outcomes beyond early young adulthood, limiting our understanding of the potential efficacy of personality-targeted intervention beyond adolescence.

The present study focuses on sensation seeking and lack of perseverance. High sensation-seeking youth may be more drawn to contexts where drinking occurs and seek out the short-term physical sensations associated with drinking [5,13,21]. The association between sensation seeking and HED may be greatest during mid-late adolescence when sensation seeking peaks [11,12] and when drinking is more novel. Youth low on perseverance are highly susceptible to boredom, have a limited sense of responsibility, and are unmotivated to succeed in work or school [21]. As a result, they may be easily distracted by fun activities, such as parties, exacerbating the likelihood of alcohol harm. Lack of perseverance may be a particularly salient risk

factor for alcohol during young adulthood when there are fewer social controls to assist in behavior regulation. However, environmental influences, such as parental monitoring could potentially buffer these risks.

Parental monitoring and alcohol

Parental monitoring has been operationalized differently across the literature [24]. Yet, evidence suggests that the key ingredient in the effectiveness of parental monitoring for alcohol outcomes is how much a parent knows, or how much youth perceive his/her parent knows about their behavior [8,25]. Despite varied definitions, research shows that the less a parent knows about their child's whereabouts, peers, and activities, the more likely they are to use alcohol during adolescence and young adulthood [7,26]. Parental monitoring works as a protective factor by minimizing adolescents' involvement in riskier situations and limiting association with deviant peer groups [25]. Parental monitoring may also moderate associations between personality traits and alcohol outcomes. Parents of youth high on these traits may be able to mitigate alcohol risks by closely monitoring their youth's activities, instilling a sense of responsibility, and encouraging involvement in a variety of health-stimulating activities.

Only one previous study assessed whether parental monitoring interacts with personality traits to influence alcohol outcomes [9]. This study found no evidence of a significant interaction between sensation seeking and parental monitoring; rather, parental monitoring had a protective effect on alcohol dependence regardless of sensation-seeking level. However, this study was limited to first-year college students, one personality trait, and alcohol dependence. Parental monitoring may only buffer personality traits during specific developmental periods or only act as a moderator for specific alcohol outcomes. Building on this previous work, we examined whether parental monitoring moderates the associations between sensation seeking, lack of perseverance, and alcohol outcomes over time.

The current study

This study examines the time-varying independent and combined effects of sensation seeking, lack of perseverance, and parental monitoring on heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems from ages 16 to 28 years. We use an innovative TVEM approach to investigate age-graded differences in associations over time. Based on past research, we expected sensation seeking to be more strongly associated with heavy drinking and lack of perseverance to be more strongly associated with alcohol-related problems [3]. Furthermore, we expected these associations to be strongest during adolescence and decline with age. Finally, we expected that parental monitoring would buffer the effect of sensation seeking and lack of perseverance on alcohol outcomes during adolescence.

Methods

Participants and procedures

Participants were from the Victoria Healthy Youth Survey and assessed biennially between 2003 and 2013 (six waves) [27]. Participants were recruited from a medium-sized Canadian city using random digit dialing of 9,500 private telephone listings. Of

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