



Adolescent drinking in different contexts: What behaviors do parents control?



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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that the context in which drinking occurs contribute to specific alcohol-related problems. In the current study we assessed how often adolescents attended different contexts in which they could drink, how often they drank in those contexts, and whether drinking patterns and parental monitoring were related to alcohol use in those contexts. We collected survey data from 1217 adolescents 15–18 years of age in 24 mid-sized California cities. Measures included past-year frequencies of attending and drinking in restaurants, bars/nightclubs, and outdoor places, typical hours spent at home (i.e., own home or someone else's home), perceptions of parental control and disclosure to parents about free time activities, and demographics. Multilevel zero-inflated negative binomial models were used to assess associations between drinking patterns, parental control, and disclosure and frequency of attending and drinking in specific contexts. There were large variations in attending contexts in which drinking could take place. More frequent drinking was related to less time spent at home, while heavier drinking was associated with more time spent at home. Parental control was related to less frequent attendance at bars/nightclubs, and disclosure to less frequent involvement in outdoor activities and spending more time at home. Among drinkers, frequencies of attendance were strongly related to frequencies of drinking in all contexts except the home. Parental control and disclosure were related to more frequent drinking at restaurants and exposure to bars/nightclubs and drinking at outdoor activities. Parental monitoring may reduce exposure to risks by shifting adolescent contexts for alcohol use.

1. Introduction

Previous research shows that the context in which drinking occurs (e.g., parties, own home, outdoor places) can contribute to specific alcohol-related problems, such as aggression, risky sex, and driving after drinking alcohol (Bersamin, Paschall, Saltz, & Zamboanga, 2012; Graham, Wells, & Jelley, 2002; Huckle, Gruenewald, & Ponicki, 2016; Mair, Cunradi, Gruenewald, Todd, & Remer, 2013; Mair, Lipperman-Kreda, Gruenewald, Bersamin, & Grube, 2015; Mair, Ponicki, & Gruenewald, 2016). For example, in a recent study we found that problems with parents or police were associated with more frequent drinking in outdoor places (e.g., parking lots or street corners), but these risks declined at higher levels of drinking (Mair et al., 2015). In contrast, the volume, but not frequency, of alcohol consumed at someone else's home without parents and at restaurants, bars or nightclubs was associated with greater risks of experiencing violence. This research highlights the importance of focusing on contexts in

which adolescent alcohol use occurs and the processes by which young people select specific contexts for drinking. Understanding contexts most closely related to underage drinking and problems would allow enforcement agents, health practitioners, and parents to modify and control opportunities for use and reduce problems. In this study we assessed how often young people attended different contexts in which they could drink and how often they drank in those contexts, regardless of how much time they typically spend in them. We further investigated whether parental monitoring was related to attending and using alcohol in these contexts.

Over the early life course, underage drinking is distributed differently across different physical locations (e.g., parties, own home, outdoor places) and as adolescents get older they change their use of these places for drinking (Lipperman-Kreda, Mair, Bersamin, Gruenewald, & Grube, 2015). A few previous studies have shown that adolescents with different individual characteristics and drinking patterns drink in different contexts (Anderson & Brown, 2010;

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Goncy & Mrug, 2013; Harford & Grant, 1987; Harford & Spiegler, 1983; Lipperman-Kreda et al., 2015). In line with social-ecological theories (Gruenewald, Remer, & Lascala, 2014), this previous research suggests that adolescents deliberately select drinking environments that fit their drinking patterns. However, the observed associations between drinking patterns and drinking contexts may be a result of how often adolescents are in specific contexts in which they could potentially drink, rather than attributes of those contexts per se. For example, frequent drinking at home may simply reflect the time spent in the home environment, rather than a causal relationship. To address this issue, we investigate (1) whether adolescent drinkers visit certain contexts more or less often than non-drinkers and (2) whether they consume alcohol in these contexts, regardless of how much time they spend in them.

Parental monitoring may also influence youth's drinking in different contexts, especially if youth make determinations about how likely it is that they will be caught, get in trouble, or disappoint their parents if they were to drink in a specific context. Although previous research has shown that higher levels of perceived parental monitoring, parent-child communication, and parent-child closeness are associated with delayed or reduced levels of adolescent substance use (Duncan, Duncan, Biglan, & Ary, 1998; Moore, Rothwell, & Segrott, 2010; Patock-Peckham, King, Morgan-Lopez, Ulloa, & Moses, 2011; Ryan, Jorm, & Lubman, 2010; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Webb, Bray, Getz, & Adams, 2002), no previous study has investigated associations between these measures and adolescents' use of specific contexts for drinking.

Parental monitoring reflects parents' knowledge of their children's whereabouts and social connections through passive or active tracking, surveillance, or attention (Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Patock-Peckham et al., 2011). However, recent research suggests that parents' knowledge of youth whereabouts is also a function of youth disclosure of what they do during free time, a possible proxy for parent-child closeness and communication (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Therefore, to investigate whether parental monitoring alter how often adolescents attend and drink in specific contexts, we need to consider both parental control and adolescent disclosure to their parents of what they do during free time. Understanding the contribution of parental monitoring to drinking in specific contexts can support the development of effective messaging to parents about their role and about specific monitoring practices that can help reduce drinking and drinking-related problems in this age group.

To better understand how adolescents use specific contexts for drinking and what behaviors might be altered by parental monitoring, we investigated the following research questions in a sample of 15–18 year olds in 24 California cities:

- (1) Do underage drinkers differ from non-drinkers in their overall use of different contexts in which drinking can occur?
- (2) Do parental control and disclosure to parents about free time activities alter how often youth use specific contexts in which drinking can occur?
- (3) Controlling for overall exposure to different contexts, what are the relationships of parental control, disclosure to parents, and drinking patterns with drinking in those contexts?

The first question allows us to assess whether adolescent drinkers tend to spend more time in certain contexts regardless of whether these locations promote alcohol use. The second question will allow us to determine whether parental monitoring might explain these associations. Finally, we will look more closely at drinkers only to better understand whether and how parental monitoring and drinking patterns explain drinking in specific contexts, over and above general use of those contexts.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Sample of cities

Our study included adolescents (15–18 years old) who participated in a study in 24 midsized California cities. These cities were purposively selected from a geographically diverse sample of 50 non-contiguous California cities with populations between 50,000 and 500,000 (Lipperman-Kreda et al., 2015; Paschall, Lipperman-Kreda, Grube, & Thomas, 2014). The subset of 24 cities was chosen because they had relatively high levels of underage drinking, drinking and driving, and alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes based on three data sources: (1) the California Healthy Kids Survey, (2) a survey of over 8000 adults conducted by the Prevention Research Center, and (3) the California Statewide Integrated Traffic Reporting System. These 24 cities are part of an ongoing randomized trial to evaluate the effects of environmental strategies to reduce community alcohol problems. Data for the current analyses were collected at baseline before the interventions began.

2.2. Survey methods

Households within each city were randomly sampled from purchased lists of landline and cell phone exchanges. An invitation letter describing the study and inviting participation was mailed to households sampled from landline exchanges, for which we had address information, followed by telephone contact. Households sampled from the lists of cell phone exchanges were contacted by cell phone only. Households and participants were screened for eligibility based on city of residence and age. Of the total completed interviews, 6% were from the cell phone sample list. Participants were surveyed through a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). The interviews were given in either English or Spanish at the respondent's request and lasted approximately 20 min. Twenty youths (1.6%) asked to do the interview in Spanish. The survey took place in 2013–2014. The estimated response rate for this survey was 42%. Respondents received \$20 as compensation for their participation in the study. Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to implementation of the study.

2.3. Survey sample

The current study is based on data from 1217 adolescents (52% male, M age = 16.23 years, SD = 0.90). An average of 51 youths (range: 32–63, SD = 6.18) were interviewed in each city. Sample characteristics are provided in Table 1.

2.4. Measures

2.4.1. Frequency of drinking and heavier drinking

We used measures of drinking frequencies and heavier drinking which allow us to distinguish effects related to these two aspects of drinking patterns (Gruenewald et al., 2014). All survey respondents were asked, "Have you ever had a whole drink (more than a sip or a taste) of an alcoholic beverage?" A whole drink was defined as a bottle or can of beer, malt liquor, or flavored malt beverage, a glass of wine, a shot of liquor, or a whole mixed drink. To measure past-year alcohol use frequency (F), respondents who answered "yes" were asked, "In the past 12 months, on how many days did you have a whole drink of an alcoholic beverage?" Respondents were also asked, "In the past 12 months, on the days when you drank alcohol, how many drinks did you typically have?" Heavier drinking was calculated as $[(F \times \text{typical number of drinks}) - F]$, representing the total past-year volume beyond one drink per occasion. This heavier use measure is based upon a validated dose-response model and it allows us to better distinguish effects related to occasions of use from impacts of heavier use on these occasions (Gruenewald & Mair, 2015; Gruenewald, Wang-

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