



Original article

School District Variation in Parental Influence on Underage Drinking Behaviors


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 A B S T R A C T

Purpose: We examined the relationship between alcohol-specific and nonalcohol-specific parental characteristics with occasional alcohol drinking in early adolescence and probed potential school district variation.

Methods: A total of 1,581 fourth and sixth graders (age range: 10–12 years) were ascertained from 17 elementary schools in a cohort study conducted in northern Taiwan in 2006, with three waves of follow-up between 2007 and 2009. Information on alcohol-specific and nonalcohol-specific parental attributes was obtained from the first two waves of self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires; occasional drinking, defined by having drunk on three or more occasions in the past year, was assessed at fourth wave. School district characteristics were retrieved from official statistics and self-report. Multilevel analyses were used to evaluate strength of association, with stratification by disadvantaged status of school districts.

Results: Thirteen percent (95% confidence interval [CI] = 10.1%–15.8%) of young adolescents reported to drink occasionally; higher grade level, childhood drinking experience, lower parental education, maternal drinking, and positive parental attitude toward drinking were significant predictors. Nonalcohol parental predictors, including not living with both parents (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] = 2.34, 95% CI = 1.21–4.53) and parental involvement/reinforcement (aOR = .44; 95% CI = .22–.87), were only significant for the children of socioeconomically disadvantaged school districts. As to alcohol-specific parental characteristics, the effects of maternal drinking appear more salient in socioeconomically advantaged school districts (aOR = 2.63; 95% CI = 1.66–4.18).

Conclusions: Alcohol-specific and nonalcohol-specific parental influence may operate differentially across school districts sub-grouped by socioeconomic attributes. Preventive strategies raising the awareness of underage drinking and strengthening parenting skills should be devised and implemented in the perspective of social context.

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IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

Parental influence over alcohol consumption may differ by socioeconomic status. Nonalcohol-specific parental variables, mostly related to family social capital, appear more salient in children in socioeconomically disadvantaged school districts, whereas alcohol-specific variables, such as maternal drinking, are particularly prominent for the children in advantaged schools.

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Alcohol use and associated harms have taken an increasingly heavy toll on health globally and exacted a huge burden on national productivity in diverse populations [1]. In the year 2012, alcohol contributed to an estimated 5.9% of all deaths and

roughly 5.1% of the disease burden worldwide, as indexed by disability-adjusted life years [2]. Of particular note, alcohol-related problems seem to disproportionately affect young populations. A recent study found that individuals between the ages of 15–29 years consistently have the highest proportion of alcohol-attributable deaths, which is particularly true for developed countries [3]. Data from the World Health Organization Global Burden of Disease study indicated that alcohol is the leading risk factor for disability-adjusted life years among young people aged 10–24 years [4]. To provide insight into the design of preventive programs targeting alcohol-related health and social problems in young population, it is imperative to identify modifiable explanatory factors affecting alcohol involvement through early adolescence—the period when alcohol experimentation mostly emerges and drinking behaviors rapidly escalate [5].

The role of parents in shaping young people's drinking behaviors has long been the focus of scholars worldwide [6–8], and the processes underlying parental influences can broadly be categorized into at least two aspects [9–11]: (1) alcohol-specific parental attributes and parenting practice: the socialization theory posits that children may acquire drinking behaviors through the socializing effects of parental modeling of alcohol and the reinforcement of prosocial definition of alcohol drinking [7,8]. (2) General parental attributes and parenting behaviors: the social control theory suggests that deviant behaviors (e.g., underage drinking) may occur when children's attachment or ties with parents are poor, inappropriate, or broken [7,9,11–14].

In the broad category of alcohol-specific parental characteristics, parental drinking was perhaps one of the most studied variables [15]. In a study with nearly 1,500 adolescents on the trajectories of alcohol consumption in Australia, Altai et al. [9] found that drinking frequency was largely escalated through adolescence and paternal and maternal drinking status were the strongest predictors for the high drinking group (76%). Further studies have compared the effects of paternal and maternal drinking, suggesting that maternal drinking seems more prominent [9,16]. Other alcohol-specific characteristics are parenting styles such as parental norms, attitude, and behaviors toward offspring's drinking [16–18]. For example, a study on 416 families consisting of both parents and two adolescents reported the protective effects of strict parental rules for alcohol on delaying the offspring's onset of alcohol drinking through adolescence [18]. Recognizing that the effects of parental drinking were no longer significant after taking alcohol-specific parental attitudes or behaviors into consideration, several researchers have speculated that parental drinking may exert influences through proalcohol parenting style and therefore identified alcohol-related parenting style (e.g., parental attitude) as modifiable candidate for anti-underage drinking prevention [19,20].

Parents are not just an important source of alcohol-specific socialization; they also shape underage drinking behaviors through general parenting practices, such as monitoring, involvement/reinforcement, and warmth [11–14,21]. Parental monitoring, a set of parenting practices involving attention to and tracking of the child's whereabouts and activities, is hypothesized to operate by shielding young people from contact with alcohol exposure opportunities, presented by alcohol-using peers or environments involving alcohol [14,22–24]. Empirical evidence has demonstrated that perceiving less parental monitoring was associated with greater risk of alcohol drinking, consumption amount, and drinking problems [14,23,24]; higher

levels of parental involvement, monitoring, and expectations may delay the progression of alcohol drinking in young people [25]. Other than parenting practice, inadequate parent-child interaction or bond has been implicated in the engagement in frequent and intense drinking behaviors [14]. An earlier study on students aged 15–18 years in Sweden reported that both "living with one parent" and "living with both parents at different locations" were associated with increased odds of alcohol intoxication by 120% and 49%, respectively [26]. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the very meaning of parenting behaviors can be interpreted variously across culture and society [12,13]; therefore, the dimensions and functions of parenting behaviors should be examined within the macrocontexts and microcontexts wherein children's daily life predominantly take place (e.g., culture and neighborhood) [13,24].

Although there are cumulative literatures reporting the significant role of parental factors on shaping alcohol drinking behaviors in young population, the majority of available evidence was derived from the subjects in their mid-adolescence or from special high-risk population (e.g., children of alcoholic) [15]. Given that late childhood is the period when parents are the most important socializing agents and experimental alcohol use gradually emerges [27–29], population-based evidence pertaining to different facets of parental influences in late childhood is crucial in developing the interventions to delay the progression of drinking behaviors [30]. Furthermore, although some alcohol-specific (e.g., behavioral modeling) and nonalcohol-specific (e.g., general parenting practices) parental factors have been indicated in adolescent drinking behaviors and problems, the findings appeared not homogeneously significant across neighborhoods characterized by various socioeconomic or racial distribution [31,32]. Nevertheless, to devise context-tailored and culturally tailored preventive strategies, more studies are needed to characterize potential heterogeneity in parental influence, particularly in Asian populations [13].

The present study

In this longitudinal study, we selected a sample of elementary school-attending children with three waves of follow-up in urban area in Taiwan. Guided by the socialization and social control theories [7–11,21], we hypothesized that positive alcohol-specific parental attributes (e.g., parental drinking) in late childhood were associated with increased alcohol drinking, whereas greater parental monitoring/involvement was negatively associated with alcohol drinking in early adolescence. Previous research using this baseline sample found school district-level variation in built-in environment, administrative/educational resources, and commercial access to alcoholic beverages [33], it is expected that potential heterogeneity may exist in the connection linking alcohol-specific and nonalcohol-specific parental attributes/parenting practice with drinking behaviors [6].

Methods

Participants

Participants were obtained from the Alcohol-Related Experiences among Children, a longitudinal study investigating contextual factors on the emergence and transition of alcohol-related experiences from childhood to adolescence [27,33].

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