



The influence of parental drinking on offspring's drinking motives and drinking: A mediation analysis on 9 year follow-up data



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 September 2014

Received in revised form 14 January 2015

Accepted 17 January 2015

Available online 29 January 2015

Keywords:

Intergenerational
Parent
Alcohol
Motivation
Longitudinal
Mediation

ABSTRACT

Background and aims: The influence of parental drinking on offspring's drinking is well-documented. However, longitudinal evidence on the mediating role of drinking motives in this relationship is lacking. This study longitudinally investigates the mediating role of drinking motives in the relationship between parental and offspring's drinking. **Methods:** Using a prospective design, 587 Flemish children (response 30.0%) were followed for 9 years. Parental drinking was documented during the offspring's late childhood (10 and 11 years old) through paper-and-pencil questionnaires distributed by schools. The offspring's drinking habits and -motives were documented in early adulthood (18 and 19 year old) through a web-based questionnaire; invitations were sent by letter. Motives were measured using the Drinking Motives Questionnaire Revised Short-form, and mediation analyses were conducted with the product of coefficient test using bootstrapping. **Results:** Half the offspring were female (53.8%) and the mean age was 19.35 (SD=0.52) years. A significant direct effect of maternal drinking during childhood on offspring drinking nine years later was found ($\beta = 0.091$, $t = 2.071$, $p = 0.039$). However, the association turned non-significant after stratifying the model for boys and girls. No direct effect was found for paternal drinking on offspring's drinking. Nevertheless, paternal drinking indirectly affected offspring's drinking through offspring's enhancement motives ($\beta = 0.041$, 95%CI[0.004, 0.082]) and maternal drinking indirectly affected male offspring's drinking through offspring's social motives ($\beta = 0.067$, 95%CI[0.007, 0.148]).

Conclusion: These results show that parental drinking during late childhood relates to a high level of those drinking motives among young adults that are known risk factors for heavy drinking in early adulthood.

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1. Introduction

In Western countries, adolescents frequently drink alcohol, and this activity increases in prevalence in late adolescence and early adulthood (Currie et al., 2012; Hibell et al., 2011; Johnston et al., 2013; Schulte et al., 2009; Steketee et al., 2013). The influence of parental drinking on adolescents' alcohol use and alcohol initiation

is well-documented (Seljamo et al., 2006; Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2012; White et al., 2000). Adolescents who drink heavily often have parents who drink more frequently compared with adolescents who drink less (White et al., 2000), and adolescents with early drinking onset often have parents who heavily drink (Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2012).

Three pathways for explaining this intergenerational transference of alcohol use patterns have been described with some empirical support: the genetic pathway that describes the role of the inheritance of genes (i.e., the contribution of similarities in genetic makeup between parents and offspring to similarities in alcohol behaviour; Campbell and Oei, 2010); the genotype-environmental pathway that describes the effect of the relationship between genetic factors (e.g., specific genes) and environmental factors (e.g., poor family functioning because of parental problem

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drinking; [Campbell and Oei, 2010](#)); and the cognitive pathway that describes the role of cognitive factors (e.g., alcohol expectancies; [Campbell and Oei, 2010](#)). According to the interventional perspective, this latter pathway is the most accessible, because cognitions are easier to change by interventions than genes or environmental factors, such as family functioning. This paper focuses on the cognitive factors in the intergenerational transmission of alcohol use patterns.

According to Bandura's 'social learning theory' and Campbell and Oei's 'cognitive model for intergenerational transference of alcohol use behaviour', parental drinking behaviour shapes offspring's drinking activity through cognition (e.g., alcohol expectancies; [Bandura, 1986](#); [Campbell and Oei, 2010](#)). In turn, these expectancies determine drinking motives that are repeatedly found to be more proximal to alcohol use than expectancies ([Cox and Klinger, 1988](#); [Cox and Klinger, 2004](#); [Kuntsche et al., 2007, 2010](#); [Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#)).

Based on the 'Motivational model of alcohol use', drinking motives can be grouped into four dimensions based on the valence (i.e., positive or negative) and the source (i.e., external or internal) of the expected outcome from drinking alcohol: social motives (positive, external; e.g., to make social gatherings more fun), enhancement motives (positive, internal; e.g., to get high), conformity motives (negative, external; e.g., to be liked) and coping motives (negative, internal; e.g., to cheer up when in a bad mood; [Bandura, 1986](#); [Campbell and Oei, 2010](#); [Cox and Klinger, 1988, 2004](#)).

Despite this theoretical embedment, only a few cross-sectional studies have empirically investigated the mediating effect of drinking motives in the intergenerational transference of alcohol use ([Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#); [Woldt and Bradley, 2002](#)). All of the studies found a mediating effect of drinking motives but found differences in the type of motives involved. One study found a mediating effect of enhancement, and interpersonal facilitation (similar to conformity) motives ([Woldt and Bradley, 2002](#)), and another study found that all except conformity motives had a mediating role ([Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#)). These distinct findings might be caused by a few differences between these studies; one study investigated the mediating effect of drinking motives on the relationship between parental problematic drinking and alcohol use in offenders of driving under influence aged 17–71 years old in the US ([Woldt and Bradley, 2002](#)), whereas the other study investigated this relationship in a general population of adolescents in Switzerland ([Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#)). Both studies also assessed drinking behaviour and drinking motives differently.

Furthermore, the available evidence has some important limitations. First, all available studies used a cross-sectional design ([Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#); [Woldt and Bradley, 2002](#)). By using a longitudinal design, the effect of past parental drinking patterns (e.g., during childhood) on current adolescents' drinking motives and drinking can be investigated. These long-term effects are important because prior to the first drinking experience, cognitive foundations are established through parental modelling ([Campbell and Oei, 2010](#); [Van der Vorst et al., 2013](#)). These cognitive foundations are then further reinforced after alcohol is (repeatedly) consumed ([Campbell and Oei, 2010](#); [Van der Vorst et al., 2013](#)). A second limitation is that previous studies only measured parental drinking through the offspring's perception of parental drinking. By using this method, these studies used a less accurate source for parental drinking and only investigated the perception of one source (i.e., the offspring), whereas all family members experience alcohol-specific socialisation (e.g., rule setting, talking about alcohol use) differently ([Smith et al., 1999](#); [van der Vorst et al., 2005](#)). Therefore, the conclusions from the available studies should be generalised with caution ([van der Vorst et al., 2005](#)) and the effect of parental drinking should be investigated from additional family viewpoints (e.g., parents themselves). Finally, previous studies

were only conducted in two countries, which make replication in other countries necessary ([Kuntsche et al., 2004](#)).

The first objective of the current study was to longitudinally confirm the relationship between parental and offspring drinking in a general population of Flemish (northern Belgium) adolescents and their parents. Based on previous research ([White et al., 2000](#)), we hypothesised that parental drinking during their offspring's childhood positively relates to offspring's drinking when they are young adults. A second objective was to use a prospective design to investigate the mediating role of drinking motives in this relationship. Based on the findings from previous research that was conducted in a general population of adolescents in a west-European country (Switzerland; [Muller and Kuntsche, 2011](#)), we hypothesised that the relationship between parental and offspring drinking would be mediated by social, enhancement and coping motives. Furthermore, we investigated the differential influence of maternal and paternal drinking and investigated interaction effects with offspring's gender to take into account the unique influence of each parent on both sons and daughters ([Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2012](#); [Wickrama et al., 1999](#); [Windle and Windle, 2012](#); [Yu and Perrine, 1997](#)).

2. Material and methods

2.1. Study design

Data were obtained from the Longitudinal Eating and Activity study (LEA-study) conducted in Flanders (Belgium). This study observed 5th grade children (mean age = 9.93 years, SD = 0.48) and their parents for 9.5 years, and data were collected in six waves (in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2012). In 2002, 100 schools from two Flemish regions were randomly selected and contacted, and 59 schools agreed to participate. From these schools all fifth graders and their parents were invited ($N=1957$), and 1725 children and parents were willing to participate. The current study used two waves: wave two (2003; at that time, parental drinking was measured before drinking onset of the children) and wave six (2012; the time at which the offspring entered adulthood). In wave two (mean age = 10.96 years, SD = 0.49), all respondents and their parents from wave one were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire distributed by the schools at school and at home, respectively. This procedure resulted in 1614 completed questionnaires (response 93.5%). At the time of wave six (mean age = 19.36 years, SD = 0.52), offspring were in their first year of higher education or employed, which made classroom-based questioning impossible. Therefore, all offspring who had an available address were sent a letter to their home address with an invitation to complete a web-based questionnaire. For those respondents without internet access a paper version could be requested. In total, 651 questionnaires were completed (response 37.7%). In this wave, only offspring were questioned. Combining the parental data from wave two and the offspring's data from wave six resulted in a data set of 587 participants in which both waves could be matched. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Ghent University.

2.2. Participants

At wave two, parental questionnaires were mainly answered by mothers (82.9%). Consequently, 82.9% of the paternal data was retrieved through mothers, because at wave two only one parent was questioned. The gender distribution of the children was slightly different at wave six, with 46.2% of the offspring being boys compared with 51.6% at wave two.

Attrition analyses comparing the remaining participants at wave six to those who dropped out ($N=1042$) showed no

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