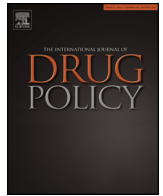




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Research paper

Peer pressure and alcohol use in young men: A mediation analysis of drinking motives

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ABSTRACT

Background: Peer pressure (PP) has been shown to play a major role in the development and continuation of alcohol use and misuse. To date, almost all the studies investigating the association of PP with alcohol use only considered the PP for misconduct but largely ignored other aspects of PP, such as pressure for peer involvement and peer conformity. Moreover, it is not clear whether the association of PP with alcohol use is direct or mediated by other factors. The aim of the present study was to investigate the association of different aspects of peer pressure (PP) with drinking volume (DV) and risky single-occasion drinking (RSOD), and to explore whether these associations were mediated by drinking motives (DM).

Methods: A representative sample of 5521 young Swiss men, aged around 20 years old, completed a questionnaire assessing their usual weekly DV, the frequency of RSOD, DM (i.e. enhancement, social, coping, and conformity motives), and 3 aspects of PP (i.e. misconduct, peer involvement, and peer conformity). Associations between PP and alcohol outcomes (DV and RSOD) as well as the mediation of DM were tested using structural equation models.

Results: Peer pressure to misconduct was associated with more alcohol use, whereas peer involvement and peer conformity were associated with less alcohol use. Associations of drinking outcomes with PP to misconduct and peer involvement were partially mediated by enhancement and coping motives, while the association with peer conformity was partially mediated by enhancement and conformity motives.

Conclusions: Results suggest that PP to misconduct constitutes a risk factor, while peer conformity and peer involvement reflect protective factors with regard to alcohol use. Moreover, results from the mediation analyses suggest that part of the association of PP with alcohol use came indirectly through DM: PP was associated with DM, which in turn were associated with alcohol use.

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Introduction

Late adolescence and early adulthood have been described as periods of frequent alcohol abuse and risky behaviour (Barnes, Welte, & Dintcheff, 1992; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002), leading to numerous negative consequences and problems (Gmel, Rehm, & Kuntsche, 2003; Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005). Peer pressure (PP), defined as the “pressure to think or to behave along certain peer-prescribed guidelines” (Clasen & Brown, 1985, p. 452), has been

shown to play a major role in the development and continuation of alcohol use and other risky behaviour during adolescence and early adulthood (e.g. Aseltine, 1995; Bahr, Hoffmann, & Yang, 2005; Borsari & Carey, 2001; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Crockett, Raffaelli, & Shen, 2006; Dielman, Campanelli, Shope, & Butchart, 1987; Dumas, Ellis, & Wolfe, 2012; Jessor, Costa, Krueger, & Turbin, 2006; Kuntsche, Rehm, & Gmel, 2004; Stacy, Sussman, Dent, & Burton, 1992). However, little is known about the more proximal factors underlying the association of peer pressure with drinking behaviour. The present study looks at the association between the more distal factor of ‘peer pressure’ and alcohol use in a sample of 20-year old Swiss men, and how this association is mediated by a more proximal factor, namely the motives for drinking alcohol.

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Peer pressure is a key component in the socialization of adolescents and younger adults (Clasen & Brown, 1985). It shapes their sense of identity (Erikson, 1968) and the perceived norms of which behaviours are acceptable or not (Bandura, 1977). Peer pressure is not a unitary (one-dimensional) construct, but rather a multidimensional one. Clasen and Brown (1985, see also Brown et al., 1986) clustered peer pressure into 5 different domains: peer involvement (i.e. involvement in peer social activities, such as spending free time with friends, attending parties, and school social events), misconduct (i.e. use of substances, unsafe sex, and minor delinquent behaviours), peer conformity (i.e. conformity to peer norms such as dressing or grooming styles, and musical tastes), involvement in school (e.g. being agreeable with teachers, working as diligently as possible), and involvement with family (e.g. obeying parents, showing respect for adults). These authors developed a questionnaire – the peer pressure inventory (PPI) – designed to evaluate different aspects of peer pressure.

To date, almost all the studies investigating the association of peer pressure with alcohol use only considered the aspect of misconduct as one sub-dimension of peer pressure. They showed that number of peers drinking alcohol, and peer pressure to use alcohol and other substances (which is the main part of the concept of ‘misconduct’), were positively related to drinking outcomes (Bahr et al., 2005; Dielman et al., 1987; Flannery, Vazsonyi, Torquati, & Fridrich, 1994; Jamison & Myers, 2008; Keefe, 1994; Oostveen, Knibbe, & De Vries, 1996; Scull, Kupersmidt, Parker, Elmore, & Benson, 2010; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007; Svensson, 2010; Urberg, Değirmencioglu, & Pilgrim, 1997). However, as noted by Allen and Antonishak (2008), not all peer influences are negative by definition: peers may also have positive influence, such as promoting prosocial and non-deviant behaviours. This positive side of peer pressure has been typically overlooked, in particular with regards to its association with alcohol. The first aim of the present study was to fill this gap by investigating not only the associations of misconduct with alcohol use, but also that of other aspects of peer pressure.

Literature on peer pressure also indicated that peer pressure may be direct and indirect. Direct peer pressure may exist in the form of explicit invitations to drink, such as offering somebody drinks, paying for rounds, dares or encouragement to drink (e.g. during drinking games), whereas indirect peer pressure may occur because of its contribution to the formation of alcohol-related cognitions (e.g. the personal norms, beliefs, expectations and motivations of the individual) that are in turn expected to dictate drinking behaviours (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Maisto, Carey, & Bradizza, 1999; Simons-Morton, Haynie, Crump, Eitel, & Saylor, 2001). Few studies have examined whether the association of peer pressure and substance use was direct or indirect, i.e. independently contributed to alcohol use or was mediated through other more proximal factors.

Drinking motives (DM) – the value placed on the particular effects individuals want to achieve when drinking alcohol (Cox & Klinger, 2004) – are often considered the most proximal factors underlying drinking behaviour through which the influence of more distal factors are mediated (Cooper, 1994; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Engels, & Gmel, 2007; Tragesser, Sher, Trull, & Park, 2007). Drinking motives have been described according to 2 distinct dimensions of the outcomes which individuals hope to achieve by drinking: valence (i.e. drinking to enhance positive or reduce negative affect), and source (i.e. drinking to obtain an internal reward or to achieve external reward) (Cox & Klinger, 1988). Cooper (1994) developed a questionnaire – the Drinking Motive Questionnaire Revised (DMQ-R) – designed to yield 4 distinct drinking motives resulting from the combination of the dimensions of valence and source. Social motives (e.g. drinking because it makes social gatherings more fun) reflect drinking for positive, externally generated reinforcement;

conformity motives (e.g. drinking to not feel left out) denote drinking for negative, externally generated reinforcement; enhancement motives (e.g. drinking to get high) indicate drinking for positive, internally generated reinforcement; coping motives (e.g. drinking to forget worries) indicate drinking for negative, internally generated reinforcement.

Several recent studies have provided evidence that associations of alcohol use with psychological factors such as alcohol expectancies (Kuntsche et al., 2007; Kuntsche, Wiers, Janssen, & Gmel, 2010), temperament, and personality (Kuntsche, von Fischer, & Gmel, 2008; Stewart, Zvolensky, & Eifert, 2001; Tragesser et al., 2007; Willem, Bijttebier, Claes, & Uytterhaegen, 2012) were mediated by drinking motives. Other studies have provided evidence that associations of alcohol use with more social factors, such as social norms (Halim, Hasking, & Allen, 2012) and parental drinking habits (Müller & Kuntsche, 2011), were also mediated by drinking motives. These findings suggest that drinking motives may also account for indirect (i.e. mediated) associations of alcohol use with peer pressure. The second aim of this study was to investigate whether the association of peer pressure with alcohol use was mediated by drinking motives. Evidence of mediation would suggest that peer pressure influences the formation of drinking motives which in turn are associated with alcohol use. Direct effects would mean that peer pressure itself is an additional risk factor for alcohol use, over and above its association with the drinking motives of an individual.

Based on a representative sample of young Swiss adult males, the present study aimed to investigate the associations of usual weekly drinking volume (DV) and risky single-occasion drinking (RSOD) with three peer pressure aspects (i.e. misconduct, peer involvement, peer conformity). The other peer pressure domains related to family involvement and school involvement were not assessed because most young adults in Switzerland no longer attend school nor live with their parents (Baggio, Studer, Daepfen, & Gmel, 2013). We hypothesized that peer pressure to misconduct was positively related to alcohol use because misconduct reflects the negative side of peer pressure. In contrast, we hypothesized that peer pressure for peer involvement and peer conformity reflected the positive side of peer pressure and negative associations with alcohol use were expected, over and above that of misconduct. With regard to mediation, we expected associations of peer pressure with alcohol use to be mainly mediated by enhancement and coping motives, because enhancement and coping motives are generally more strongly related to alcohol use outcomes than social and conformity motives (Kuntsche et al., 2005).

Methods

Enrolment procedure

The present study's data are part of the baseline phase of a larger project – the Cohort Study on Substance Use Risk Factor (C-SURF) – designed to assess substance use patterns and their related consequences in a cohort of young Swiss men. The protocol (Protocol No. 15/07) was approved by Lausanne University Medical School's Clinical Research Ethics Committee.

In Switzerland, army recruitment is compulsory and virtually all young men of around 19 years old are called up to one of 6 national recruitment centres to determine their eligibility for military or civil service. Study enrolment took place between August 23, 2010, and November 15, 2011, in 3 army recruitment centres located in Lausanne (French-speaking), Windisch, and Mels (German-speaking). These 3 centres cover 21 of Switzerland's 26 cantons, including all French-speaking cantons. As there is no pre-selection for army conscription, a virtually complete census of the Swiss male population in this age group was eligible for inclusion in the study.

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