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The Association of Harsh Parenting, Parent-Child Communication, and Parental Alcohol Use With Male Alcohol Use Into Emerging Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigates the association between mother and father harsh parenting, and parent-child communication, and parental alcohol use on males' alcohol use from early adolescence into emerging adulthood.

Methods: Data come from the Iowa Youth and Families Project, a prospective 28-year longitudinal study of rural Midwestern youth and their families. Mother and father harsh parenting, parent-child communication, and alcohol use were assessed at time 1 when males were in early adolescence (13 years old, $n = 215$). Target male alcohol use was assessed at time 2 during late adolescence (18 and 19 years old, $n = 206$, 96% follow-up rate), and at time 3 in emerging adulthood (23 and 25 years old, $n = 197$, 92% follow-up rate).

Results: Results obtained from structural equation modeling using Mplus, version 7, statistical software indicated that father harsh parenting in early adolescence was directly associated with alcohol use in emerging adulthood. Mother communication was negatively associated while father alcohol use was positively associated with adolescent alcohol use in late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Alcohol use in late adolescence was significantly related to alcohol use in emerging adulthood.

Conclusion: This study offers unique insights into how mother- and father-son dyads differ in communication and parenting styles, as well as how these associations influence adolescent male alcohol use continuing into emerging adulthood. Multiple informants utilized in the current study provide a more complex understanding of how each parent uniquely contributes to the role of their adolescent's alcohol use in late adolescence into emerging adulthood.

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IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

Adolescence is a critical time developmentally for male youth; it is imperative that rural-dwelling parents continue to be educated on the unique gendered effects of their alcohol use patterns, harsh parenting, and the importance of positive communication practices, as they all influence their sons' alcohol consumption in late adolescence into emerging adulthood.

Adolescence marks the time when risk-taking behavior, such as alcohol use, increases [1]. Although underage drinking may be viewed as normative [2], it has been linked to negative outcomes

such as poor school performance, involvement in other risky behaviors, and even death [3]. In adolescence, areas of the frontal brain begin to mature that support decision-making, making the teen years crucial to brain development. Occupying 50% of the brain, white matter is composed of myelinated axons that connect neurons across the brain [4]. Healthy males show continuous growth in white matter from childhood through early adulthood, while females show growth during mid-adolescence

Conflicts of interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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[5]. White matter growth in adolescence is associated with improved inhibitory control, suggesting that timing of growth is crucial for cognitive development [5]. Importantly, compared to light drinkers, adolescents who binge drank (i.e., consuming 5 or more drinks in a row at least once a month) had significantly less white matter quality in multiple regions of the brain [6].

Indeed, males who binge drink are at higher risk for alcohol use disorders in adulthood [7]. Moreover, alcohol use that is initiated in early adolescence can escalate through late adolescence [8], and continue into emerging adulthood [9]. It has been suggested that harsh parenting, parent-child communication, and parental alcohol use may be related to youth drinking. For example, harsh parenting is associated with higher levels of adolescent alcohol use [10]. A lack of parent-child communication, especially with males, is related to increased alcohol use in adolescence [11]. Finally, parental alcohol use is linked to adolescent alcohol use [12]. Despite this evidence, few studies have examined the associations of harsh parenting, parent-child communication, and parental alcohol use on adolescent alcohol use into emerging adulthood all within the same model [13]. Many studies have merged parenting of mothers and fathers [14] or have primarily focused on the mother-child relationship [15], even though research shows that youth identify more with their same-sex parent [16]. Although alcohol use in adolescence significantly increases the likelihood of subsequent alcohol use through late adolescence and into emerging adulthood [17], few studies have examined these effects on rural adolescents in the United States [18], despite findings that less urbanized youth are at a higher risk for underage drinking than those in larger metro cities [19].

Compared with females, male youth engage in higher ratings of sensation seeking and impulsivity which are related to heavy drinking and problem drinking [20]. Although teen alcohol use is at an all-time low, the prevalence and binge drinking patterns of male youth are still higher than their female counterparts [21]. This suggests that it may be important to investigate parental factors affecting adolescent male problem alcohol use into emerging adulthood. Thus, the current investigation extends previous research by examining the influence of parenting in adolescence on male alcohol use into late adolescence and emerging adulthood, analyzing parents separately, as well as using both observed and self-reported measures. In addition, we assess the unique influence that parents have with their adolescent sons in rural Midwestern communities.

Harsh parenting and adolescent alcohol use

Research suggests that parenting is one of the primary antecedents for predicting adolescent alcohol use [22]. For example, harsh and coercive parenting is associated with adolescent drinking behavior [13] that extends into emerging adulthood [23]. Adolescents whose fathers used an authoritarian style of parenting had a weaker father-child relationship and a greater engagement in substance abuse and delinquency than those whose fathers employed an authoritative parenting style [24]. Results of these studies highlight the importance of understanding how parenting behavior can influence alcohol use in adolescence into emerging adulthood.

Parental communication and adolescent alcohol use

High levels of parent-adolescent conflict are associated with poor adolescent well-being and increased risk of substance use

[10]. Specifically, difficulty talking to one's parents is associated with adolescent alcohol use [25]. It has been demonstrated that adolescents are reluctant to talk to their parents about risky situations [26], despite findings that suggest healthy parent-child communication serves as a protective factor in their youths' decision to engage in risky behaviors [27]. Although mother's positive parenting in adolescence may help to lessen the effects of harsh parenting from the father [28], in emerging adulthood, the effects of father harshness may be more detrimental. Taken together, these results highlight the importance of positive communication patterns between parents and their youth in adolescence.

Parental alcohol use and adolescent alcohol use

Adolescents who are exposed to parental problem drinking are at higher risk of life stress and psychological problems, as well as substance use disorders [12]. Specifically, high school students are at much higher risk of developing problem drinking behaviors if they have a parent, specifically a father, who drinks heavily [29]. For example, fathers who engage in a higher frequency and volume of alcohol consumption are associated with a higher volume and frequency of alcohol consumed by the adolescent. Other research suggests adolescents are more likely to drink alcohol if they have two parents who are heavy episodic drinkers [30]. Similarly, the probability of an adolescent developing a high trajectory for alcohol use increased with both maternal and paternal severity of drinking, such that adolescents were more likely to develop problem drinking if they were exposed to parents who drank moderately or heavily than those whose parents never or mildly drank alcohol [13]. These results demonstrate the consequences parental problem drinking can impose on the developmental trajectories for adolescent substance use.

Continuity of alcohol use over time

Approximately, 18% of 8th graders, 38% of 10th graders, and 56% of 12th graders in the United States have consumed alcohol, and 6%, 21%, and 37% of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, respectively, have been drunk in the past year [21]. Early initiation of alcohol use has been shown to predict increasing use throughout adolescence [8]. Indeed, research has found that frequency, heavy episodic drinking, volume, and quantity increased on average from ages 15 to 21 years, and measures of heavy episodic drinking and volume were strongly correlated from ages 15 to 25 years, suggesting those who engage in heavy drinking during high school will likely continue this problem drinking into emerging adulthood [7]. In addition, research indicates that less urbanized adolescents may be at an increased risk for alcohol use disorders than those from larger metro areas [19].

Taken together, parenting behavior, communication, and substance use influence adolescent alcohol use which continues into emerging adulthood. These parental associations may be more profound for adolescent boys. Thus, the present investigation examined the association between harsh parenting, parent-child communication, and parental alcohol use in adolescence with male alcohol use in late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Data come from a two-decade longitudinal study of a cohort of rural Midwestern adolescents, and their families whom were followed from early adolescence through emerging adulthood.

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