



Perceived parental alcohol problems and drinking patterns in youth: A cross-sectional study of 69,030 secondary education students in Denmark



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine whether young people with parental alcohol problems have different drinking patterns than those without parental alcohol problems. Further, we examined whether the association between parental alcohol problems and young people's drinking patterns differed depending on the gender of the child and the parent, and whether more severe parental alcohol problems and cohabitation with the parent with alcohol problems was associated with earlier and heavier drinking patterns.

Data came from the Danish National Youth Study 2014, a web-based national survey. 75,025 high school and vocational school students (15–25 years) participated. Drinking patterns were investigated by the following outcomes: non-drinking, weekly alcohol consumption, frequent binge drinking, and early intoxication debut age. The main predictor variables were perceived parental alcohol problems, gender of the parent with alcohol problems, cohabitation with a parent with alcohol problems and severity of the parents' alcohol problems.

Young people with parental alcohol problems had a higher weekly alcohol consumption (boys: 15.2 vs. 13.9 drinks per week; girls: 11.6 vs. 10.2 drinks per week), higher odds of early intoxication debut age (boys: OR = 1.68 [95% CI 1.50–1.89]; girls: OR 1.95 [95% CI 1.79–2.14]), and more frequent binge drinking (boys, OR = 1.16 [95% CI 1.04–1.29]; girls, OR = 1.21 [95% CI 1.11–1.32]) compared to young people without parental alcohol problems.

In conclusion, this study shows that young people with perceived parental alcohol problems have an earlier intoxication debut age, binge drink more frequently, and drink larger quantities per week than young people without perceived parental alcohol problems.

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1. Introduction

The heritability of alcohol use disorders is well documented and there is strong evidence indicating that children of parents with alcohol use disorders are between 2 and 10 times more likely to develop alcohol use disorders than other adults (Sher, 1997; Lieberman, 2000; Johnson and Leff, 1999; Slutske et al., 2008; Lieb et al., 2002; Chassin et al., 1996; Chassin et al., 1999; Sørensen et al., 2011; Verhulst et al., 2015; Edwards et al., 2015; Knop et al., 2003).

Many existing studies on parental alcohol problems and drinking patterns among their children have largely been based on severe and often clinical cases of parental alcohol problems (Lieb et al., 2002; Chassin et al., 1996; Sørensen et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2012), such as alcohol use disorders. The selection of more severe cases may have led to an overestimation of adverse consequences. More studies based on the general population are needed in order to generalize clinical

results and expand the existing knowledge of the consequences of parental alcohol problems on drinking patterns among young people.

In Denmark, it has been estimated that 9.5% of children aged 0–18 years grow up in families with alcohol problems (Kristiansen et al., 2008). Given the high prevalence of children with parents with alcohol problems gaining insight into the heritability of unhealthy drinking patterns is an important public health and prevention issue.

It is unclear whether gender differences are important in relation to the effects of parental alcohol problems and children's drinking patterns (Lieb et al., 2002; Sørensen et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 1995; Haugland et al., 2013; Pearson et al., 2012; Coffelt et al., 2006; Harburg et al., 1982). Studies have suggested that children are more likely to imitate the drinking of the same-sex parent and that girls are more vulnerable to parental alcohol problems than boys (Sørensen et al., 2011; Coffelt et al., 2006; Harburg et al., 1982). For example, Haugland et al. (Haugland et al., 2013) found that fathers' alcohol problems were associated with higher alcohol consumption among both boys and girls, whereas mothers' alcohol problems were associated with lower odds of high alcohol consumption among boys. Pearson et al. (Pearson et al., 2012), in a study of college students, also found a consistent

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pattern indicating that mothers' alcohol problems were significantly, more strongly associated with more alcohol use and alcohol-related problems among girls but not boys. However, previous findings lack consistency. For example, Lieb et al. (Lieb et al., 2002) found no difference between boys and girls, but found that mothers' alcohol problems affected the transition from occasional into regular alcohol use, whereas fathers' alcohol problems also increased the risk of transition from regular into hazardous use in their children. Therefore, to improve the understanding of the relationship between parental alcohol problems and drinking patterns among their children, studies that include information on the gender of the parents and children are required.

Previous research has also suggested that the association between parental alcohol problems and drinking patterns in the child might depend on whether or not the child lives with the parent with alcohol problems (Cleveland et al., 2014) and whether both parents have alcohol problems (Lieb et al., 2002; Pearson et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2013). Though most studies have found evidence of imitative transmission of drinking patterns from parents to children (Sher, 1997; Lieberman, 2000; Johnson and Leff, 1999; Slutske et al., 2008; Lieb et al., 2002; Chassin et al., 1996; Chassin et al., 1999; Sørensen et al., 2011; Verhulst et al., 2015; Rossow et al., 2015; Trim et al., 2010), aversive transmission has also been found among young people with parents with alcohol problems (Haugland et al., 2013; Harburg et al., 1982; Haller and Chassin, 2010). Some young people with parental alcohol problems may choose to reduce their drinking or abstain completely in order to avoid the negative consequences of alcohol use observed in their parents (Haugland et al., 2013; Haller and Chassin, 2010). Hence, parental alcohol problems may have bidirectional effects on children's drinking, leading to more risky drinking patterns in some and less drinking or non-drinking in others.

The present study aimed to examine whether young people with perceived parental alcohol problems have different drinking patterns than those without perceived parental alcohol problems. We also examined whether the association between parental alcohol problems and young people's drinking patterns differed depending on the gender of the child and the parent, and whether more severe parental alcohol problems and cohabitation with the parent with alcohol problems was associated with earlier and heavier drinking patterns.

2. Method

2.1. The Danish National Youth Study 2014

The data came from the Danish National Youth Study 2014, a national survey of 75,853 high school and vocational school students. The Danish National Youth Study was conducted with the aim of investigating health, health behavior and mental health among young people in secondary education in Denmark. In spring 2014 all of Denmark's 137 general high schools and the 12 largest vocational schools were invited to participate. School participant proportion was 87% among high schools and 83% among vocational schools. In high schools, students in all grades and classes were invited to participate ($N = 83,751$), while only students in basic courses at vocational schools were invited ($N = 7527$). Individual participant proportions were 84% for students in high schools and 69% for vocational school students. Data was collected from January to November 2014. Teachers gave students a code for accessing the electronic survey. Students answered the electronic questionnaire, which consisted of a total of 380 questions, in class during one to two lessons lasting 45 min each. Participants older than 25 and younger than 15 years of age ($N = 828$) and participants with missing data on perceived parental alcohol problems ($N = 3081$), perceived ethnicity ($N = 1031$), financial strains in the family within the last year ($N = 1151$), parental separation within the last year ($N = 104$), and family fragmentation ($N = 679$) were excluded from all analysis. After excluding missing on the outcomes, the study population was respectively 68,418, 68,491, and 69,030, in analysis of non-drinking/weekly alcohol

consumption, frequent binge drinking and early intoxication debut age as the outcome.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Perceived parental alcohol problems

Parental alcohol problems were self-reported by young people and indicated through the question "Does anyone in your immediate family have alcohol problems?" The possible responses were "no, no one," "mother," "father," "step-parent," "siblings," or "other adults."

2.2.2. Parental alcohol problems

An overall variable indicating if participants perceived any parent (mother/father/step-parent) to have alcohol problems (yes/no) was constructed.

2.2.3. Parent with alcohol problems

Based on the same question, a variable was coded to distinguish between the alcohol problems of mothers, fathers, step-parents or both parents.

2.2.4. Cohabitation with parent with alcohol problems

To examine the role of cohabitation with parents with parental alcohol problems, a variable was coded to differentiate between those living with and without the parent with perceived alcohol problems.

2.2.5. Insecure due to parents' drinking

To study the severity of parental alcohol problems, participants who had previously answered that they had a parent with alcohol problems were asked whether they "had ever felt insecure because their mother, father, or step-parent was affected by alcohol?" The possible answers were: "no, never," "yes, sometimes," and "yes, often."

2.2.6. Yelling or scolding due to parents' drinking

Participants were also asked if they "had ever been yelled at or scolded because their mother, father, or step-parent was affected by alcohol?" The possible answers were: "no, never," "yes, sometimes," and "yes, often."

2.2.7. Drinking patterns

Drinking patterns among young people with perceived parental alcohol problems were measured in terms of four different outcomes: 1) non-drinking 2) weekly alcohol consumption, 3) frequent binge drinking, and 4) early intoxication debut age.

2.2.8. Non-drinking

Non-drinkers were defined as those who answered that they never drank alcohol on weekdays or at weekends and those who answered they did not drink any alcoholic drinks during a typical week. Non-drinkers were given the value 0 in the weekly alcohol consumption sum score.

2.2.9. Weekly alcohol consumption

Participants were asked how many alcoholic drinks (12 g of pure alcohol) they normally drank each day in a typical week. A *weekly alcohol consumption* score was calculated using the sum of alcoholic drinks consumed on each of the weekdays.

2.2.10. Frequent binge drinking

Participants were asked how many times within the last 30 days they had consumed 5 or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion. *Frequent binge drinking* was defined as having consumed >5 alcoholic drinks 4 or more times within the last 30 days. Non-drinkers were all added to the infrequent binge-drinking group in this variable. The cut-off point was chosen in order to distinguish those with more extreme binge drinking patterns from what is normal in Danish youth drinking culture

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