Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología y Salud (2015) 6, 53–63

REVISTA IBEROAMERICANA
DE PSICOLOGÍA Y SALUD
Revista Oficial de la Federación Iberoamericana de Asociaciones de Psicología (FIAP)
[Official Journal of the Latin-American Federation of Psychological Associations]
www.elsevier.es/rips

Youth alcohol drinking behavior: Associated risk and protective factors

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Received 30 October 2014; accepted 25 February 2015
Available online 2 May 2015

KEYWORDS
Risk factors;
Protective factors;
Alcohol use;
Prediction model;
Theoretical model

Abstract Alcohol consumption prevalence in Bolivia is one of the highest in the region and the most degrading practices faced by the society. To apply the changes, social policy makers require objective, accurate, and complete information about the factors that could be considered both guards and risky. Hence, links between socio-demographics, family, personal/behavioral and social variables and youth alcohol use were analyzed in order to know their particular contributions to the explanation of drinking behavior. The study was carried out with a sample of 1,023 young students (13–23 years old), of both sexes (515 male and 508 female) recruited from local high schools and university initial undergraduate courses. The results showed strong ties between such variables and adolescent alcohol drinking behavior. The predictive model (linear regression model) fitted relatively well including variables such as age, parental monitoring, father–adolescent relationship, peer pressure, antisocial behavior and risk perception. Nevertheless, only social and parental variables proved a good fit with the empirical data when a theoretical model was proposed through a structured equation modeling. Although this model seems to be in good shape, it should be adjusted to a more comprehensive approach to a risk/protection conceptual framework.
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PALABRAS CLAVE
Factores de riesgo;
Factores de protección;
Uso de alcohol;
Modelo predictivo;
Modelo teórico

Consumo de Alcohol en la juventud: factores asociados de riesgo y protección

Resumen La prevalencia de consumo de alcohol en Bolivia es una de las más altas en la región y una de las prácticas más degradantes que enfrenta la sociedad. Para realizar cambios duraderos, los formuladores de políticas sociales requieren información objetiva, exacta y completa sobre los factores de riesgo y protección de este problema. Por lo tanto, se analizaron los vínculos entre algunas variables socio-demográficas, familiares, personales y sociales con el comportamiento de consumo de alcohol. El estudio se realizó con una muestra de

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rips.2015.03.001
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1.023 jóvenes estudiantes (13 a 23 años de edad), de ambos sexos, reclutados de las escuelas secundarias locales y cursos universitarios iniciales. Los resultados mostraron fuertes lazos entre las variables analizadas y el consumo de alcohol de los adolescentes. El modelo predictivo ajustó relativamente bien incluyendo variables como la edad, control parental, relación padre-adolescente, presión de grupo, comportamiento antisocial y percepción de riesgo. Sin embargo, sólo las variables sociales y parentales demostraron un buen ajuste con los datos empíricos cuando se propuso un modelo teórico a través de ecuaciones estructurales. Aunque este modelo parece estar en buena forma, debería ser mejor ajustado de cara a un marco conceptual más integrado de las nociones de riesgo y protección.
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Social policy makers are mainly interested in having a complete picture about the social, cultural, economic and psychological factors impacting vulnerable population sectors such as children, adolescents, women and elderly. Their work requires objective, precise and comprehensive information on those variables that actually enhance poverty and reduce well-being.

Alcohol abuse is one of the most well-known personal and social degrading practices; it surely impacts social and family relationships, job stability at the workplace, and endanger lives beyond the person who suffers from this condition. The toll it takes on a person's health and the emotional damage inflicted on others can be devastating and life threatening.

Alcohol abuse is of special concern in our society, due to direct association with major physical and mental health problems. Alcohol consumption prevalence in Bolivia is among the highest in the region; a recent nationwide study ($N = 14{,}166$) has shown that life prevalence is 77.2%, annual prevalence is 59.1% and monthly prevalence 36.7%. A university study carried out by the Andean Community in cooperation with IACD and the Vice ministry of Social Defense has shown that life prevalence of alcohol use is 77.6%, annual alcohol consumption prevalence is 57.6% and monthly prevalence is 35.1%. Out of those that declared to have drunk during the last year (57.6%), 38.7% has shown to have risky or harmful consumption, and 17.3% has shown to have alcohol dependence.

These figures and recent alcohol related events: increased traffic accidents and increased public safety problems have sparked overall general concern in Bolivian society. Public opinion has forced the ruling government to adopt and pass several alcohol oriented laws to cope with the problem. The number of alcohol related deaths due to traffic accidents is extremely high and domestic violence figures show a close relationship with alcohol consumption.

Therefore, the study of determinant factors of alcohol abuse would provide policy makers with the conceptual bases to make decisions and develop preventive or remedial strategies oriented to reduce incidence of alcohol abuse in our societies lowering at the same time, the occurrence of all related problems.

A risk factor is a variable that significantly predicts whether an individual will develop disorder or disease. According to Mrazek and Haggerty (1994), to qualify as a risk factor, ''a variable must be associated with an increased probability of disorder and must antedate the onset of disorder'' (p. 129). ''It is a measurable characterization of each subject in a specified population that precedes the outcome of interest and which can be used to divide the population into two groups: the high-risk and the low-risk groups that comprise the total population'' (Kraemer, Kazdin, & Offord, 1997, p. 338).

Specialized literature (Donovan, 2004) identifies several factors or group of factors, variables or conditions highly correlated with alcohol abuse that could be generically defined as risk factors. The author points out at least five inclusive categories of risk factors: socio-demographic, family domain, peer domain, personality domain, and behavioral domain.

Socio-demographic risk factors. In the first category, we usually find variables such as gender, age, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status as potential risk factors for alcohol consumption onset. Information concerning many of these variables is derived primarily from descriptive epidemiology, using cross-sectional surveys that rely on aggregate analyses. Findings recommend careful interpretation of these indicators since isolated analysis could drive to limited conclusions. For example, studies intending to show differences between male and female concerning initiation of alcohol drinking were statistically non-significant (Beck, Shattuck, Haynie, Davis, & Simons-Morton, 1999).

Family risk factors. During the last decades, the family influence of literature on child and adolescent behavior occupied the central attention of developmental specialists around the world. Family variables that have been found to predict alcohol drinking onset fall into three general categories: (a) family composition; (b) parental or sibling modeling and approval of drinking; and (c) parenting and parent–child relationship.

In spite of this classification, family variables seem to be of central importance to explain pro-social as well as antisocial behavior of youngsters. In the last domain, family background like instability, carelessness, lack of support and warmth, violence and conflict, poor discipline practices, parent–youth relation difficulties, and lack of control among other related problems, have been consistently associated

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