



Adolescent-Parent Communication as a Moderator Between Adolescent Paid Work and Substance Use

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Abstract

Because paid work has been found to be a risk factor for involvement with substance use for some, but not all, adolescents, it is important to examine variables that moderate this relationship. This study extends prior research indicating that adolescent-parent communication may protect adolescents from the development of problem behaviors by exploring the moderating effects of adolescent-parent communication on the relationship between paid work and substance use. Multiple hierarchical regression models were conducted to examine main effects and interactions of paid work and adolescent-mother/father communication. For alcohol consumption, there were significant main effects for boys' paid work and girls' paid work and adolescent-mother communication. For cigarette smoking, there was a significant main effect for girls' adolescent-mother communication. For marijuana use, there were significant main effects for girls' paid work and adolescent-mother communication. Although adolescent-parent communication was not found to moderate the relationship between paid work and substance use, adolescent-mother communication consistently predicted substance use for girls. Paid work was also a significant predictor for alcohol consumption for boys and girls and for marijuana use for girls.

Sample

- 1,001 adolescent boys (47%) and girls (53%)
- Diverse sample – 59% Caucasian; 22% African-American; 12% Hispanic; 2% Asian; 5% 'Other'
- Age range = 15-17 years old; Mean age = 16.09 (SD=.68)
- All adolescents were 10th (58%) or 11th (42%) grade students attending public high schools in Delaware, Maryland, or Pennsylvania

Procedures

The adolescents in this study participated in a larger research project (The University of Delaware's Adolescent Adjustment Project).

Adolescents were given a packet of questionnaires in school by trained research staff during the spring of 2007. The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the packet, adolescents received a free movie pass for participating in the study.

Measures

Adolescent-Parent Communication. A measure assessing adolescent-mother/father communication was given to the adolescents. This measure included 20 items on each scale that reflect the degree to which adolescents agree or disagree with certain statements about communication with their parents. Adolescents were asked to rate each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Substance Use.

Alcohol. Adolescents were asked to complete an alcohol use survey using a standard quantity-frequency index. Adolescents were asked to respond to items relating to their consumption of beer, wine, and hard liquor during the past 30 days.

Cigarettes. A single item was used to assess cigarette smoking. Adolescents were asked to indicate how many cigarettes or packs of cigarettes they usually smoked per day in the last 6 months using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 = none to 6 = about 2 packs or more per day.

Marijuana. A single item was used to assess marijuana use. Adolescents were asked to indicate how often they used marijuana or hashish in the last 6 months using a 8-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0=never to 7=every day.

Participation in Extracurricular Activities. A measure assessing extracurricular activities was given to the adolescents. This measure included 11 items that reflect the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports, paid work, and hanging out with friends. Adolescents were asked to rate their frequency of participation using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *no involvement* to 6 = *every day*.

Analyses

A series of hierarchical regression models was conducted to examine the potential moderating effect of adolescent-parent communication. In each of the models, Block 1 contained race and mother's and father's education level. Block 2 contained the main effects of paid work and adolescent-mother/father communication. Block 3 contained the interactions between paid work and adolescent-mother communication and paid work and adolescent-father communication. The criterion variables were alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, and marijuana use. Analyses were conducted for boys and girls separately.

Results

For quantity of alcohol consumption, Block 1 was significant for boys ($F(3, 271)=.111, p=.027$) and girls ($F(3, 326)=5.173, p=.002$). The only significant predictor was race for both boys ($B=-.174, p=.004$) and girls ($B=-.200, p=.001$). Block 2 also was significant for boys ($F(3, 268)=5.135, p=.002$) and girls ($F(3, 323)=4.226, p=.006$). For boys, paid work was significant ($B=.201, p=.001$) and for girls, paid work ($B=.117, p=.030$) and adolescent-mother communication ($B=-.159, p=.004$) were significant. Block 3 was not significant for boys or girls.

For frequency of cigarette smoking, Block 1 was significant for boys ($F(3, 271)=3.603, p=.014$) and girls ($F(3, 334)=4.451, p=.004$). For boys, father's education was the only significant predictor ($B=-.202, p=.005$), but for girls, both race ($B=-.120, p=.027$) and mother's education ($B=-.164, p=.006$) significantly predicting cigarette smoking. Block 2 was not significant for boys, but was significant for girls ($F(3, 331)=4.030, p=.008$) with adolescent-mother communication being the only significant predictor ($B=-.158, p=.004$). Block 3 was not significant for boys or girls.

For frequency of marijuana use, none of the three Blocks were significant for boys. For girls, Block 1 was significant ($F(3, 340)=3.096, p=.027$), with race being the only significant predictor of marijuana use ($B=-.133, p=.014$). In Block 2 ($F(3, 337)=7.546, p=.001$), paid work ($B=.186, p=.001$) and adolescent-mother communication ($B=-.174, p=.001$) were significant. Block 3 was not significant for girls.

Conclusions

Results from this study revealed several significant main effects for paid work and adolescent-parent communication. Paid work significantly predicted quantity of alcohol consumption for boys and girl and marijuana use for girls. Adolescent-mother communication significantly predicted quantity of alcohol consumption, frequency of cigarette smoking, and frequency of marijuana use for girls. Adolescent-mother communication was not significant for boys and adolescent-father communication was not significant for boys or girls.

Although adolescent-parent communication was not found to moderate the relationship between adolescent paid work and substance use, adolescent-mother communication consistently predicted substance use for girls, but not for boys.