

Parental Substance Use Consequences and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment

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Abstract

This study examined the relations between parental substance use consequences and adolescent psychological problems by the gender of the adolescent and the gender of the parent. The sample included 173 families from the Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA) project. Results from logistic regression models indicated that concern about mother's substance use was a significant predictor of adolescent alcohol dependence and major depressive disorder. In addition, concern about father's substance use significantly predicted adolescent alcohol dependence. Avoidance of mother when (she was) drinking or using drugs and maternal anger when drinking or using drugs also significantly predicted adolescent alcohol dependence, conduct disorder, and major depressive disorder. In contrast, avoidance of father and paternal anger when drinking or using drugs did not significantly predict any of the adolescent diagnoses. These results suggest that maternal substance use consequences may be more closely linked to adolescent psychological adjustment than are paternal substance use consequences.

Research Questions

- Are parental substance use consequences (avoidance of parent when drinking or using drugs, concern about parent's substance use, parental anger when drinking or using drugs) related to adolescent psychopathology?
- Do the relations between parental substance use consequences and adolescent psychopathology differ by the gender of the adolescent and/or the gender of the parent?

COGA

- A large-scale extended family study designed to follow alcoholics and their families over time
- Primary goal is to find genetic and environmental factors involved in the development of alcoholism
- Six national research sites involved
- COGA began in 1989 and is currently ongoing (data for this study were collected between 1989-1994)
- Recruitment occurs through inpatient and outpatient treatment centers and from within the community

Sample

- 173 13-17 year-old adolescent boys (51%) and girls and their biological mothers and fathers
- Mean age of adolescents = 15.17 (SD = 1.42)
- Primarily Caucasian (94%)
- All of the parents drank or used drugs (43% of the fathers and 30% of the mothers met the DSM-III-R criteria for alcohol dependence)

Measures

The Semi-Structured Assessment for the Genetics of Alcoholism for Adolescents (C-SSAGA-A)

- A clinical, diagnostic psychiatric interview
- Good psychometric properties (Kuperman et al., 2001)
- Assesses 17 Axis I psychiatric diagnoses & ASPD
- Uses DSM-III-R and DSM-IV criteria
- Yields both current and lifetime psychiatric diagnoses
- In the present investigation, lifetime psychiatric diagnoses of alcohol dependence, conduct disorder, and major depressive disorder were examined.

The Structured Assessment Record of Alcoholic Homes (SARAH)

- Self-report measure assessing parental substance use consequences
- Includes the following scales:

Concern/Worry about Parent's Substance Use
Avoidance of Parent When (Parent is) Drinking or Using Drugs
Parental Anger When Drinking or Using Drugs

- Scale scores were created by summing items (see Table 1 for scale items)
- Alpha coefficients ranged from .72-.88
- Logarithm transformations were used because scale scores were skewed

Table 1

The Structured Assessment Record of Alcoholic Homes (SARAH)

Concern/Worry about Parent's Substance Use

- Have you ever worried about your mother's/father's drinking or (drug use) when you are away from the house, like when you are in school?
- Have you ever gotten upset or nervous when you thought your mother/father was going to start drinking (or using drugs)?
- Whenever your mother/father has been drinking (or using drugs), have you ever gone to them and asked them to stop?
- Have you ever told your mother/father they have been drinking too much, or that they should not be using drugs?
- Have you ever tried to be nicer than usual, extra good, hoping that this might stop your mother/father from drinking (or using drugs)?

Avoidance of Parent When Drinking (or Using Drugs)

- When your mother/father was drinking (or using drugs), did you ever try to stay out of their way by going to another part of the house?
- Have you ever left the house because of your mother's/father's drinking (or drug use)?

Parental Anger When Drinking (or Using Drugs)

- When your mother/father has had too much to drink, or has taken drugs, have they ever said or done anything that upset you or hurt your feelings?
- Did your mother/father ever argue or fight when one of them had been drinking (or using drugs)?
- Has your mother/father ever thrown things or broken things when she/he has been drinking (or using drugs)?

Analyses

Logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine whether parental substance use consequences predicted adolescent psychological problems

- Separate models were conducted for each of the psychiatric diagnoses and for each of the parental substance use consequences
- The first block included a dummy variable reflecting case dependence, race, gender, and age
- The second block included the paternal and maternal substance use consequences scales
- The final block included the interaction terms between adolescent gender and the parental substance use consequences scales

Results

Concern/Worry about Parental Substance Use (see Table 2)

- Adolescent's concern about mother's substance use significantly predicted alcohol dependence and major depressive disorder
- Adolescent's concern about father's substance use significantly predicted alcohol dependence
- None of the interactions between gender and concern about parent's substance use were significant

Avoidance of Parent When Parent is Drinking or Using Drugs (see Table 3)

- Avoidance of mother significantly predicted adolescent alcohol dependence, conduct disorder, and major depressive disorder
- Avoidance of father did not predict any of the adolescent diagnoses
- None of the interactions between gender and avoidance of the parent were significant

Parental Anger When Drinking or Using Drugs (see Table 4)

- Maternal anger when drinking or using drugs significantly predicted alcohol dependence, conduct disorder, and major depressive disorder
- A significant interaction was found for adolescent gender and maternal anger indicating that maternal anger predicted alcohol dependence for girls, but not for boys
- Paternal anger when drinking or using drugs did not predict any of the adolescent psychiatric diagnoses

Conclusions

Results from this study suggest that maternal substance use consequences are more consistently related to adolescent psychological problems than are paternal substance use consequences. Moreover, this study highlights the usefulness of adopting a microlevel approach when examining the relationship between parental substance use and offspring adjustment.

Table 2

Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Adolescent Psychiatric Diagnoses from Concern/Worry about Parent's Substance Use

| Predictors | Alcohol Dependence | | Conduct Disorder | | Depression | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|------|------------|-------|
| | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE |
| Race | -4.40 | 23.40 | .44 | 1.19 | -6.82 | 26.37 |
| Gender | .51 | .92 | -.60 | .71 | .73 | .86 |
| Age | 1.06** | .39 | .05 | .16 | .32 | .18 |
| Case Dependence | 1.21 | .73 | .56 | .45 | .15 | .49 |
| Concern (Mother) | .67** | .22 | .25 | .15 | .47** | .16 |
| Concern (Father) | .45* | .22 | .17 | .16 | .30 | .18 |
| Gender x Concern (Mother) | .21 | .43 | .22 | .30 | -.28 | .32 |
| Gender x Concern (Father) | .05 | .46 | -.08 | .32 | .32 | .37 |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Adolescent Psychiatric Diagnoses from Avoidance of Parents When They are Drinking or Using Drugs

| Predictors | Alcohol Dependence | | Conduct Disorder | | Depression | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|-----|------------|-------|
| | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE |
| Race | -5.26 | 31.10 | 1.07 | .93 | -7.22 | 23.73 |
| Gender | .91 | 1.21 | .14 | .98 | -1.43 | 1.32 |
| Age | .99** | .34 | .10 | .15 | .21 | .18 |
| Case Dependence | .94 | .66 | .55 | .44 | .03 | .52 |
| Avoid (Mother) | .66* | .27 | .44* | .18 | .78*** | .22 |
| Avoid (Father) | .28 | .29 | .16 | .22 | .51 | .27 |
| Gender x Avoid (Mother) | .70 | .53 | .45 | .35 | -.43 | .43 |
| Gender x Avoid (Father) | .05 | .59 | .21 | .43 | -.71 | .54 |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Adolescent Psychiatric Diagnoses from Parental Anger When Drinking or Using Drugs

| Predictors | Alcohol Dependence | | Conduct Disorder | | Depression | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|-----|------------|-------|
| | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE | <i>B</i> | SE |
| Race | -4.96 | 33.62 | .99 | .92 | -6.68 | 26.88 |
| Gender | .09 | .90 | -.35 | .66 | .30 | .74 |
| Age | .89** | .32 | .06 | .15 | .07 | .17 |
| Case Dependence | .76 | .66 | .33 | .43 | -.02 | .50 |
| Anger (Mother) | .70* | .30 | .34* | .17 | .47** | .18 |
| Anger (Father) | .15 | .26 | .13 | .17 | .34 | .18 |
| Gender x Anger (Mother) | 1.21* | .59 | .38 | .33 | -.21 | .37 |
| Gender x Anger (Father) | -.69 | .51 | .03 | .34 | .07 | .36 |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.