



The Effects of Parental Problem Drinking on Adolescent Delinquency

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Abstract

Children of alcoholics (COAs) have a greater likelihood of experiencing a wide array of life stressors within the home that significantly affect adolescent adjustment. It is essential to further preceding research and enhance the general understanding of adolescent behaviors through the examination of parental problem drinking in order to combat adolescent hardships and instill successful preventative programs for those at risk for problem behaviors. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the relationship between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquent behaviors. This study extends prior investigations by independently examining the effects of both maternal and paternal problem drinking on adolescent delinquent behavior. The current study is based on data from the Adolescent Adjustment Project (AAP), a 5-year longitudinal study that surveyed over 1,000 high school students in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. Data analyses were completed to explore the relationships between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquency (conduct disorder (CD) and Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) symptomatology). Results demonstrated a significant, positive correlation between paternal problem drinking and ASPD for adolescent boys, and a significant, positive correlation between maternal problem drinking and CD for adolescent girls. These relationships support the notion of a same-sex correlation between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquent behaviors.

Sample

- 1,031 10th and 11th grade high school students (52.5% girls)
- 58% Caucasian; 22% African-American; 12% Hispanic; 2% Asian
- Mean age = 16.15 (SD=.75); age range 15-18
- All participants attended a public high school in Delaware, Pennsylvania, or Maryland
- Most of the adolescents (56%) lived with both biological parents; 89% lived with their biological mother and 61% lived with their biological father

Race/Ethnicity	Male (%)	Female (%)
Caucasian	58.1	58.1
African American	21.8	23.1
Hispanic	11.6	11.7
Asian	2.7	2.1
Other	5.7	5.1
Mean age 16.15		
SD 0.751		

Measures

Parental Problem Drinking

In order to examine adolescents' perception of parental problem drinking, participants completed a revised 9-item version of the *Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test* (M-SMAST/F-SMAST; Crews & Sher, 1992). Maternal and paternal problem drinking were measured separately. A sample item is "Has your mother (or father) ever neglected his/her obligations, family, or work for two or more days because he/she was drinking?" The M-SMAST and F-SMAST items were summed to create separate total scores for mothers and fathers. Because this measure yields continuous scores, parental alcoholism is referred to as problem drinking.

Adolescent Delinquency

The *Conduct Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder Problems Survey* was used to measure adolescent delinquent behaviors. This measure includes two subscales that assessed both Conduct Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder delinquent behavior before and after 15 years old. A sample item is "Since you were fifteen years old, have you had problems like driving while intoxicated or speeding?" The response scale ranges from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Procedures

In 2008 and 2009, Time 3 and Time 4 respectively, trained research assistants administered surveys to over 1,000 adolescents from public high school in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland to students who provided assent and parental consent. The survey took approximately 40 minutes for participants to complete. Correlation and regression analyses were completed by gender of the parent and gender of the adolescent to determine significant and non-significant relationships between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquency. Regression analyses controlled for confounding variables such as age and socioeconomic status.

Variable		1	2
1. Paternal problem drinking	Males	--	.267**
	Females	--	.244**
2. Maternal problem drinking	Males	.267**	--
	Females	.244**	--
3. Conduct Disorder	Males	.070	.039
	Females	.072	.172*
4. Antisocial Personality Disorder	Males	.278**	.009
	Females	-.030	.016

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

Results

Adolescent Boys

After running a correlation analysis, there was a significant, positive correlation between paternal problem drinking at Time 3 and Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) for adolescent boys at Time 4. See Table 2. Thus, as the father's problem drinking increased, the likelihood of expressing ASPD for adolescent boys also increased. This relationship remained significant after regression analyses were accounted for. See Table 3.

There was not a significant relationship between paternal or maternal problem drinking at Time 3 and Conduct Disorder (CD) for adolescent boys at Time 4. Additionally, there was no significant relationship between ASPD in adolescent boys at Time 4 and maternal problem drinking at Time 3.

Adolescent Girls

Correlation analyses indicated that there was a significant, positive correlation between maternal problem drinking at Time 3 and Conduct Disorder (CD) for adolescent girls at Time 4. See Table 2. Therefore, as the mother's problem drinking increased, the likelihood of expressing CD for adolescent girls also increased.

As shown in Table 3, after running regression analyses and controlling for age and socioeconomic status, the relationship between maternal problem drinking at Time 3 and CD in adolescent girls at Time 4 was no longer significant. This indicates a weaker correlation when extraneous variables are accounted for.

Paternal problem drinking at Time 3 did not predict CD or ASPD for adolescent girls at Time 4. There was no significant relationship between maternal problem drinking at Time 3 and ASPD in adolescent girls at Time 4.

Conclusions

The current study examined the relationship between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquent behaviors, specifically through the examination of Conduct Disorder (CD) and Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). Research analyses accounted for gender of the parent and gender of the adolescent. This study furthers prior investigations by examining the effects of maternal and paternal problem drinking separately. Results portrayed a significant, positive correlation between paternal problem drinking and ASPD for adolescent boys, and a significant, positive correlation between maternal problem drinking and CD in adolescent girls. These findings support a same-sex relationship between parental problem drinking and adolescent delinquency. However, when regression analyses were completed and socioeconomic status and age of the adolescent were considered, there was not a significant relationship between maternal problem drinking and CD in adolescent girls. Future research is needed to explore this relationship and the effects of confounding variables. The present findings are crucial in developing successful prevention programs for at risk adolescents and furthering adolescent development research.

		Conduct Disorder	Antisocial Personality Disorder
		β	β
Paternal problem drinking	Males	-.051	.276**
	Females	.052	-.046
Maternal problem drinking	Males	.085	.009
	Females	.138	-.011

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

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