Parental Problem Drinking and Adolescent Externalizing Behaviors: The Mediating Role of Family Functioning

Laura J. Finan, Jessica Schulz, & Mellissa S. Gordon,
University of Delaware

Christine McCauley Ohannessian
University of Connecticut School of Medicine &
Connecticut Children’s Medical Center
Research Question

• What are the relationships among parental problem drinking, family functioning, and adolescent externalizing behaviors?

• Do these relationships vary by adolescent and parent gender?
Theoretical Frameworks

• **Family system theory** (Cox & Paley, 1997; 2003)
  – Examine individuals within the context of their families
  – Mutual influences among family subsystems

• **Social learning theory** (Bussey & Bandura, 1984)
  – Children imitate their same sex-parent
Parental Problem Drinking

• Parental substance use may have adverse outcomes for adolescents (Kendler et al., 2013; Vermeulen-Smit et al. 2012)

• Differential effects for maternal and paternal problem drinking
  – Unique influences of each parent (Shorey et al., 2013)
  – Mothers have a greater negative impact (Rognmo et al. 2012)
  – Fathers have a greater negative impact (Haugland, 2003)
Adolescent Externalizing Behaviors

• Linked to disruptive behavior and offending during adulthood (Barnes 2013; Fergusson et al. 2014)

• Children of alcoholics (COAs) are at high risk for developing externalizing disorders
  – Adolescent substance use (e.g. Coffel et al. 2006; Handley and Chassin 2013; McCarty et al. 2013; Ohannessian 2012)
  – Delinquency and aggression (Hussong et al., 2010; Marmorstein et al. 2009; Obot & Anthony, 2004)

• Unique effects for girls and boys (Skeer et al. 2011)
Family Functioning

• Family functioning supports adolescents
  – Against alcohol and drug use (Kopak et al., 2012)
  – Harmful effects of parental problem drinking (El-Sheikh & Buckhalt, 2003)

• Adolescent-parent communication
  – Related to later alcohol use initiation and lower levels of alcohol use (Ryan et al., 2010)
  – Protective factor against depression (Ohannessian 2013)

• Again, unique effects for girls and boys (Davies & Lindsay 2004)
Limitations of Previous Studies

- The inconsistent findings in research examining the role of the family in outcomes for adolescent girls’ and boys’ and the effects of mothers and fathers drinking

- This study sought to disentangle the unique effects of maternal and paternal problem drinking on adolescent girls and boys externalizing behaviors while considering the role of family functioning
Present Study

• Purpose of this study was to examine whether family functioning mediates the relationships between parental problem drinking and adolescent externalizing behaviors over time
  – Specifically, alcohol use, drug use, binge drinking, rule breaking, and aggression
  – Explore variation in these relationships by adolescent and parent gender
Hypotheses

• Hypothesis 1
  – Both maternal and paternal problem drinking will positively predict adolescent externalizing behaviors

• Hypothesis 2
  – Family cohesion, adolescent-mother communication, and adolescent-father communication will mediate the relationship between parental problem drinking and adolescent externalizing behaviors

• Hypothesis 3
  – The relationship among parental problem drinking, family functioning, and adolescent externalizing behaviors will vary by adolescent and parent gender
Sample

- Adolescent Adjustment Project (Ohannessian, 2009)

- Adolescents and their parents from 7 public high schools in the Mid-Atlantic States in the Spring of 2007 (Time 1) and 2008 (Time 2)
  - Average age of the adolescents was 16.15 ($SD = .75$
  - Approximately half identified as female (52.5%)
  - Racial ethnic groups: European American (57.9%), African American (22.6%), Hispanic (11.6%), Asian (2.4%), and Other (5.5%)
Measures

• Parental problem drinking (mother and father)

• Family functioning
  – Family cohesion
  – Adolescent-mother communication
  – Adolescent-father communication

• Adolescent externalizing behaviors
  – Alcohol use
  – Binge drinking
  – Drug use
  – Rule breaking
  – Aggression
Analytic Strategy

• Time 1: parental problem drinking and family functioning
• Time 2: adolescent externalizing behaviors

• Structural Equation Modeling used to conduct path analysis models
  – Direct paths between parental problem drinking and adolescent externalizing behaviors
  – Indirect paths through family functioning

• Multiple group analysis to determined if these relationships varied by adolescent gender
Results for Girls

- Maternal Problem Drinking
  - Family Cohesion: -.09*
  - Adolescent-Mother Communication: -.15**
  - Paternal Problem Drinking: -.20***
  - Adolescent-Father Communication: -.15**

- Family Cohesion
  - Alcohol Use
  - Drug Use
  - Binge Drinking
  - Rule Breaking Behavior
  - Aggressive Behavior

- Adolescent-Mother Communication
  - -.47****

- Adolescent-Father Communication
  - -.40***
  - -.25*
  - -.13**

- Paternal Problem Drinking
  - -.20***
  - -.15**
  - -.13**
Results for Boys
Discussion

• Maternal and paternal problem drinking was positively related to later adolescent externalizing behaviors and these relationships varied by adolescent and parent gender

• Family cohesion plays an important mediating role for boys and girls, especially for rule breaking and aggression

• For girls, adolescent-father communication plays an important role for girls externalizing behavior
Limitations

• Data in this study were collected through self-report measures

• The study is that the sample was drawn from the Mid-Atlantic U.S., and therefore the findings may not be generalized to the entire adolescent population
Conclusions

• Parental problem drinking positively predicted adolescent externalizing behaviors

• Important role of family functioning

• Need to consider both adolescent and parent gender when examining these relationships
References


Thank you!

Questions?

Contact information:
Laura Finan
Email: lfinan@udel.edu