

The DRAM, Vol. 5(6) - High school limits and college drinking: Parental influence on college students' alcohol use

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Research indicates that alcohol abuse is linked to negative consequences (e.g., drunk driving, physical altercations, etc.) among college students (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). Although previous research has shown that parental influence diminishes when adolescents enter college, more recent research suggests that parents still have some influence (Galotti & Mark, 1994; Lehr, Dilorio, Dudley, & Lipana, 2000). This week the DRAM reviews a study that examined the impact of parental permissibility of alcohol use during late high school on alcohol use and negative drinking consequences experienced among college students (Abar, Abar, & Turrisi, 2009).

Methods:

- The researchers randomly recruited 500 freshmen college students from a northeastern university to complete an online survey assessing their parent-teen communication and alcohol use behaviors.
- Participants (N=290, 58% response rate) were at least 18 years of age, were 61% female and 88.9% Caucasian; 97.2% lived in dormitories.
- The survey consisted of demographics and questions designed to measure:
 - parent permissibility of alcohol (i.e., student report of parent limit setting in high school and maternal and paternal acceptance of alcohol);
 - student drinking behavior (i.e., weekend drinking, peak drinking, and frequency of being drunk in the past month); and
 - negative consequences of alcohol within the last year (26 items from the Young Adult Alcohol Problem Screening Test; Hurlbut & Sher, 1992).

Results:

	Outcome			
	Weekend Drinking	Peak Drinking	Frequency of Drunkenness	Negative Consequences
	(R ² = .27)	(R ² = .25)	(R ² = .20)	(R ² = .59)
Student Gender	3.59*	2.68*	-0.2	1.17
	-0.9	-0.65	-0.19	-1.52
Parental Limit Setting	1.30*	1.00*	.36*	0.48
	-0.32	-0.24	-0.07	-0.53
Paternal Acceptability	0.21	0.09	0.02	-.61*
	-0.18	-0.13	-0.04	-0.28
Maternal Acceptability	-0.13	-0.05	-0.04	-0.01
	-0.18	-0.13	-0.04	-0.27
Student Weekend Drinking	–	–	–	0.29
				-0.18
Student Peak Drinking	–	–	–	.95*
				-0.22
Student Frequency of Drunkenness	–	–	–	2.96*
				-0.66

Figure. Parent permissibility and students' drinking behavior and negative consequences - unstandardized B weights and SEs (adapted from Abar et al., 2009). Click image to enlarge.

* $p < .001$. Note. These weights reflect a saturated structural equation model that also included other family variables, none of which contributed significantly. For student gender, 1=male and 0=female. For parental limit setting, a high score indicates permissive limits. Click image to enlarge.

- Students reported consuming an average of 9.14 drinks per weekend (SD=7.98), an average peak of 7.04 drinks (SD=5.77) on one occasion, being drunk an average of 1.86 (SD=1.65) times, and experiencing an average 18.90 (SD=16.44) negative consequences from alcohol in the past month.
- Parent permissibility was predictive of college drinking behaviors (see Figure).
 - Permissive parental limits for alcohol use in high school were associated with greater college drinking but not negative consequences.
 - Higher paternal acceptability of alcohol use in high school was associated with *fewer* negative consequences of college drinking.
- Separate analyses found that students whose parents had allowed no drinking during high school reported less college drinking (M diff weekend drinks = -4.99, $t(254) = -5.14$, $p < .001$; M diff peak drinks = -3.56, $t(256) = -5.10$, $p < .001$; M diff frequency of drunkenness = -1.08, t

(256) = -5.51, $p < .001$) and experienced fewer negative consequences ($M_{diff} = -10.10$, $t(256) = -5.03$, $p < .001$) than their college peers.

Limitations:

- The study used self-report and retrospective data.
- Parental variables reflected student perceptions of parent behavior.

Conclusion:

This study does not support the theory that allowing adolescents to experiment with drinking will lead to a later reduction in alcohol misuse. Instead, the study indicates that having parents who allowed any drinking during high school was a significant risk factor for alcohol misuse during college. The size of those limits, if greater than zero, did not affect negative consequences, and paternal acceptance of alcohol use had a negative effect on consequences, suggesting that among students whose parents allowed some drinking in high school, the relationship between parent permissiveness and alcohol misuse is more complicated.

— Tasha Chandler

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

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