

The DRAM, Vol. 14(9) - More harm than good: Problems with parental supply of alcohol to children

August 21, 2018

Some parents [supply their adolescent children with alcohol](#) in an attempt to protect them from heavy drinking and alcohol-related harms. However, this practice is not validated by research, and may actually be harmful since [adolescence and young adulthood marks the peak onset of alcohol use disorder](#). This week, The DRAM reviews [a study](#) by Richard Mattick and colleagues that investigates whether parental supply of alcohol to children reduces the likelihood of alcohol-related harms and future problem drinking.

What was the research question?

How is parental supply of alcohol related to harmful alcohol consumption in adolescents?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used data from the Australian Parental Supply of Alcohol Longitudinal Study, in which 1,927 Australian students and their parents were surveyed annually from grade 7 to grade 12 (ages 12 to 17 years old) about their [binge drinking](#), [alcohol-related harms](#), and [symptoms of alcohol use disorder](#)¹ in the previous 12 months. Adolescents were also asked about their alcohol supply from parents/guardians (supervised and unsupervised) and others. The researchers used [logistic regression analyses](#) to examine how parental supply, other supply, and no supply predicted alcohol consumption behaviors.

What did they find?

Parental supply of alcohol increased across the six waves (from 15% in 8th grade to 57% in grade 12). Adolescents who were supplied alcohol only from parents were [significantly](#) more likely to binge-drink, experience alcohol-related harm, and exhibit two or more symptoms of alcohol use disorder during the following year than those who were not supplied alcohol from any source. Adolescents who

were supplied alcohol from other sources (with and without additional parental supply) were at an even greater risk for binge drinking, alcohol-related harms, and two or more alcohol use disorder symptoms during the following year compared to those with no supply (see Figure). Lastly, adolescents who were supplied by parents only were twice as likely to be supplied from other sources during the following year, compared with adolescents with no supply.

Likelihood of Reporting Alcohol-Related Problems by Alcohol Supply

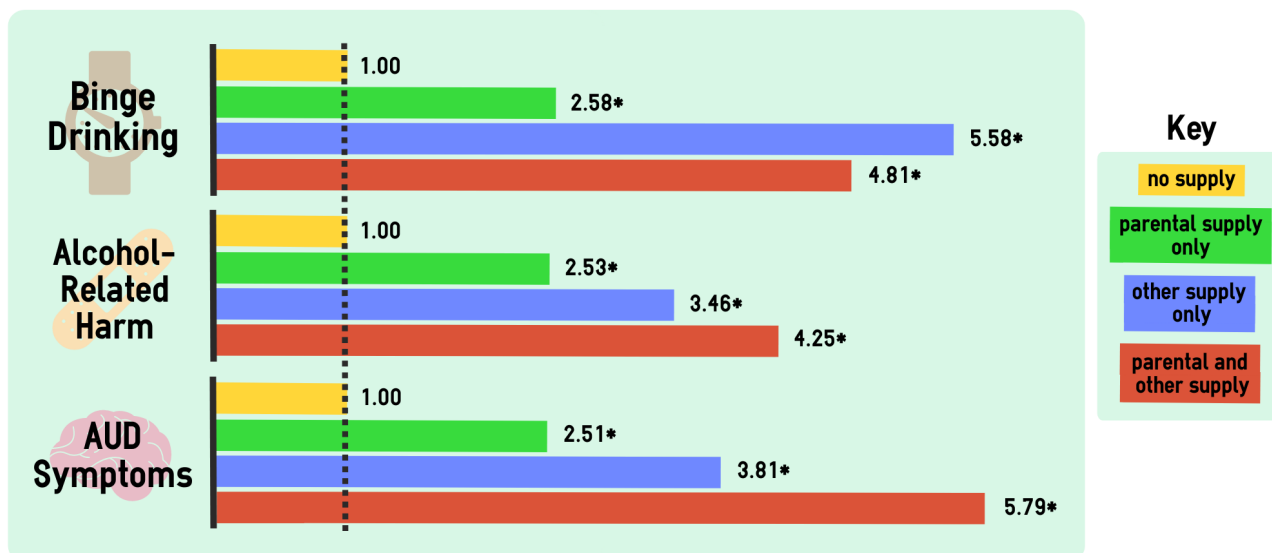


Figure. [Adjusted Odds Ratios](#) for the relationship between alcohol supply source and alcohol-related problems. Asterisks represent [statistically significant](#) effects. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Though alcohol supply from sources other than parents was associated with more problems than parental supply, there continues to be no evidence supporting the idea that parental supply of alcohol to children decreases the likelihood of current and future alcohol-related problems. Instead, when parents supply their children with alcohol, it seems to increase the risk that those children will later secure alcohol from other sources. Alcohol consumption in adolescence is harmful, regardless of the source. Therefore, parents should refrain from providing alcohol to their children themselves, and be aware of supply from additional sources as well.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?

Though children and parents completed surveys independently to eliminate parental influence on children's' answers, [self-reporting](#) sensitive information pertaining to drinking habits could result in inaccurate data. The researchers' use of [convenience sampling](#) could result in a sample not representative of the general Australian population. Other cultures in which drinking is different among adolescents may produce different, nonsignificant results.

For more information:

The [National Helpline](#) offers free referral and information for substance use support services. Additional alcohol use support services can be found on The BASIS [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— James Juviler

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

¹ Exhibiting symptoms of alcohol use disorder in early adolescence does not equate to having the disorder, but rather foreshadows future problems with alcohol use.