The Influence of Low Father Involvement and Harsh Parenting During Adolescence on Substance Use in Emerging Adulthood

Olivia Diggs, Shinyoung Jeon, M.S., & Tricia Neppl, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Research shows that harsh parenting is one of the primary components responsible for adolescent substance use (Neppl et al., 2009).
- Lower levels of parental supervision may also be associated with alcohol use in adolescence, across gender, age, and ethnicity (Pilgrim et al., 2006).
- However, much of this research has either merged parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers or has primarily focused on mothers, despite findings that father involvement is associated with socioemotional wellbeing (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003), as well as a decrease in adolescent risky behaviors (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006).
- Even less is known about the specific role fathers contribute to adolescent alcohol use as they transition into emerging adulthood.
- Therefore, the present study examines the association between observed father harsh parenting and low involvement during adolescence, and the effect these interactions have on alcohol use as adolescents grow into adulthood.

Sample

- Participants come from a two-decade longitudinal study of focal individuals and their families followed from adolescence to adulthood. Primarily rural, European-Americans were selected based on economic dislocation (N = 451).
- The present study examines observed father hostility (G1=generation 1) toward the adolescent (G2=generation 2) and low level of father involvement when focal youth were in early to middle adolescence (13, 15, and 16 years old). Adolescent substance use was assessed during late adolescence (age 18), as well as emerging adulthood (age 21).

Analyses

- Data were analyzed using Mplus Version 7 using full information maximum likelihood estimation procedures.

Measures

G1 Father Involvement (Age 13, 15, 16)

- G1 Father Self Report: Level of involvement included knowing where and who their adolescent was when they were out. Responses ranged 1 = always to 5 = never. Scores were averaged together to create a manifest variable of father low involvement in the model.

G1 Father Harsh Parenting (Age 13, 15, 16)

- Observer Report: Ratings were used to assess father hostility, antisocial behavior, and angry coerciveness toward the adolescent during a videotaped family discussion task (0=no evidence of the behavior to 9=the behavior is highly characteristic). Scores were averaged together to create a manifest variable of father harsh parenting in the model.

Late Adolescence Substance Use (Age 18)

- G2 Targets’ Self-Report: Frequency of drinking alcohol was reported by G2 targets in late adolescence (Age 18). Adolescents reported on their frequency of drinking alcohol (beer, wine, hard liquor), having three or four drinks in a row, and having five or more drinks in a row in the past month. Responses ranged from 0 = never to 5 = every day. Scores were averaged together to create a manifest variable of adolescent substance use in the model.

Emerging Adulthood Substance Use (Age 21)

- G2 Targets’ Self-Report: Frequency of drinking alcohol was reported by G2 targets in emerging adulthood (Age 21). The same items that were assessed in late adolescence were used for a manifest variable of emerging adulthood substance use in the model.

Results

- Importantly, a significant association was found between G1 father harsh parenting in middle adolescence and substance use in late adolescence. G2 substance use in middle adolescence was a strong predictor of substance use in emerging adulthood, indicating the impact of G1 fathers harsh parenting style in early adolescence. The association between G1 father harsh parenting in early adolescence and substance use in emerging adulthood was not significant, but was mediated through substance use in late adolescence.
- Results indicated that G1 low father involvement was correlated with G1 father harsh parenting, but did not have a significant association with substance use in either late adolescence or emerging adulthood. This may suggest that harsh parenting contributes more to adolescent substance use than the amount of time fathers are involved in their adolescents’ life. These results highlight the importance of intervention efforts to focus on father contributions that impact adolescent alcohol use throughout adolescence and into emerging adulthood.

Discussion