Quality of Relationships and Alcohol Dependence in Young Adults

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Alcohol dependence and abuse in young adults is a growing problem, especially on college campuses. Statements describing each relationship

- Strong family relationships (both with parents and with siblings) may potentially be a protective factor against alcohol abuse and dependence.
- Parental mentorship and support throughout this process. Finally, we would like to thank Georgia State University and the Department of Psychology for providing us with the opportunity and resources to participate in this research.

Purpose & Hypotheses

- The purpose of this study was to better understand how different dimensions of relationship quality (depth, support, and conflict) in relationships with different people (parent, sibling, significant other, and same-sex friend) relate to alcohol dependence symptoms in young adults.

Hypotheses

- In parent-child relationships, all three dimensions of relationships will be associated with alcohol dependence symptoms. Greater depth and support in the relationship will be linked to fewer symptoms, while more conflict will be linked to more symptoms.
- In sibling relationships, more conflict in the relationship will be linked to more alcohol dependence symptoms. The degree of depth and support will not be associated with symptoms.
- In same-sex friendship relationships, more conflict in the relationship will be linked to more alcohol dependence symptoms. The degree of depth and support will not be associated with symptoms.

Method

- Participants: 180 students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology. Recruited using the SONA database.
- Procedure: Participants completed two surveys:
  - Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Piers, 1989)
  - Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS; Skinner & Allen, 1982)

Procedure

- Participants completed two surveys:
  - Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Piers, 1989)
  - Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS; Skinner & Allen, 1982)
- Statements describing each relationship were rated on a 4-point scale:
  - Ratings: very low at 0, very high at 10
- 9 items per relationship (QRI items in total)
- 12 items per relationship (ADS items in total)
- 3 support items (e.g., “To what extent do you feel supported by this relationship?”)
- Supporting descriptive examples are consistent with research on the role of emotional support in personal well-being (e.g., “This person makes you feel?”)
- Conflict items (e.g., “How do you feel when this relationship is unstable?”)
- Supporting descriptive examples are consistent with research on the role of conflict in personal well-being (e.g., “This person makes you feel?”)
- 5% of relationship quality (depth, support, and conflict) in relationships with different people (parent, sibling, significant other, and same-sex friend) relate to alcohol dependence symptoms in young adults.

Results

Table 2: Correlations between ADS and QRI for Parent (N= 80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>10.49(2.25)</td>
<td>9.12(3.03)</td>
<td>6.20(2.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Sibling (N= 73)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>9.48(2.21)</td>
<td>8.61(2.93)</td>
<td>5.88(2.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 4: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Significant Other (N= 45)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Measure</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>10.22(1.80)</td>
<td>10.53(1.98)</td>
<td>5.84(2.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 5: Correlation between ADS and QRI for Same-Sex Friend (N= 80)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>9.04(2.43)</td>
<td>9.56(2.61)</td>
<td>5.04(2.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

- Parent-child relationship hypothesis was partially supported.
  - As expected, depth of relationship between young adults and their parents was negatively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms, while conflict in relationships between parent-child pairs was positively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
  - Consistent with our hypothesis, support in relationship with parent was not correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
- Sibling relationship hypothesis was not supported.
  - Contrary to our hypothesis, greater depth and support in relationships between young adults and their siblings were not negatively correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms, but surprisingly, conflict with siblings was not related to alcohol dependence symptoms.
  - These findings bolster the idea that security and stability in family relationships as well as practical availability of siblings is more age-matched family members (parents are important) for understanding risk for alcohol dependence in young adults.
- Romantic relationship hypothesis was partially supported.
  - Consistent with our hypothesis, depth and support in a relationship with a significant other were related to fewer alcohol dependence symptoms.
  - Contrary to our hypothesis, conflict with a significant other was not correlated with alcohol dependence symptoms.
- The associations between alcohol dependence symptoms and security of a romantic relationship were not consistent with research on the role of relationship quality and alcohol dependence symptoms (Trim, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2006).
- Having a romantic relationship was related to lower risk of heavy alcohol use (Fleming, White, & Callan, 2010).

References

Alcohol dependence and abuse in young adults is a growing problem, especially on college campuses. High-quality parenting may limit risk of alcohol abuse (Ober, 2012). High-quality parent-child relationships were associated with lower risk of alcohol abuse in young adults (Stulman, Feintuch-Miller, & Melchionne, 2013). Older sibling alcohol use was related to younger sibling alcohol use (Tinnin, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2000), but sibling relationship quality was not related to alcohol use (Van Der Vriet, Engels, Meess, Dokker, & Van Voorst, 2007).

Stating relationship was closely related to lower risk of heavy alcohol use (Fleming, White, & Callan, 2010).

Among older siblings alcohol use was related to younger sibling alcohol use (Tinnin, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2000), but sibling relationship quality was not related to alcohol use (Van Der Vriet, Engels, Meess, Dokker, & Van Voorst, 2007).

Having a romantic relationship was related to lower risk of heavy alcohol use (Fleming, White, & Callan, 2010).

Alcohol consumption in young adults was predicted by larger peer group alcohol consumption, rather than close friend alcohol use, but close friend alcohol use was also related (Overbeek et al., 2012).

Teen alcohol use has consistently been associated with high levels of conflict within relationships (e.g., Cernkovich et al., 2010).

There are several important dimensions of relationship quality (Piers, Saronson, & Saronson, 1993), including:
- Depth: security and stability of a relationship,
- Support: degree of availability of the other person in the relationship,
- Conflict: instability within a relationship.

Relating research on associations between interpersonal relationships and alcohol use have mostly focused on the presence or absence of relationships; there is limited research on associations between the dimensions of relationships and alcohol use.

25 items (e.g., “When you drink, do you

older sibling alcohol use was related to younger sibling alcohol use (Tinnin, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2000), but sibling relationship quality was not related to alcohol use (Van Der Vriet, Engels, Meess, Dokker, & Van Voorst, 2007).

Our study supports the idea that alcohol use is associated with lower risk of alcohol use among older siblings (Trim, Leuthe, & Chassin, 2006), but not with younger siblings. Therefore, we propose that the impact of older sibling alcohol use on younger sibling alcohol use may be mediated by the older sibling’s relationship with the younger sibling. This may provide an important avenue for prevention efforts.

In conclusion, the findings of our study suggest that parental mentorship and support throughout this process, as well as positive availability of siblings, is more age-matched family members (parents are important) for understanding risk for alcohol dependence in young adults.

We would like to thank all of the participants who participated in our study. We would also like to thank our fellow researchers who helped to collect the data: J. Allen Barr, D. Hamilton, B. Hartman, Davie Holdsworth, Ryan Miller, F. Montem, and Taylor Nipper. We would like to thank Sarah Gutter for her role in coordinating and organizing the study, and Dr. Erin Tully for her patient mentorship and support throughout this process. Finally, we would like to thank Georgia State University and the Department of Psychology for providing us with the opportunity and resources to participate in this research.