

Parents' perceptions of normative adolescent behaviours: The 'social clock' concept

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Background

- The 'social clock' concept defines the age when certain behaviours are seen as acceptable rather than concerning¹
- When adolescents reach the 'acceptable' age, parents may facilitate various behaviours seen as appropriate for that level of maturity¹

Study Aims

To explore parents' perceptions of the appropriate age for adolescents to engage in alcohol and other drug-related behaviours, and to examine how these perceptions vary by parent gender and protagonist (hypothetical child) gender

Method

Online cross-sectional survey

N=1,197 Australian parents of adolescents aged 12-17, conducted April-May 2022

Behaviours assessed

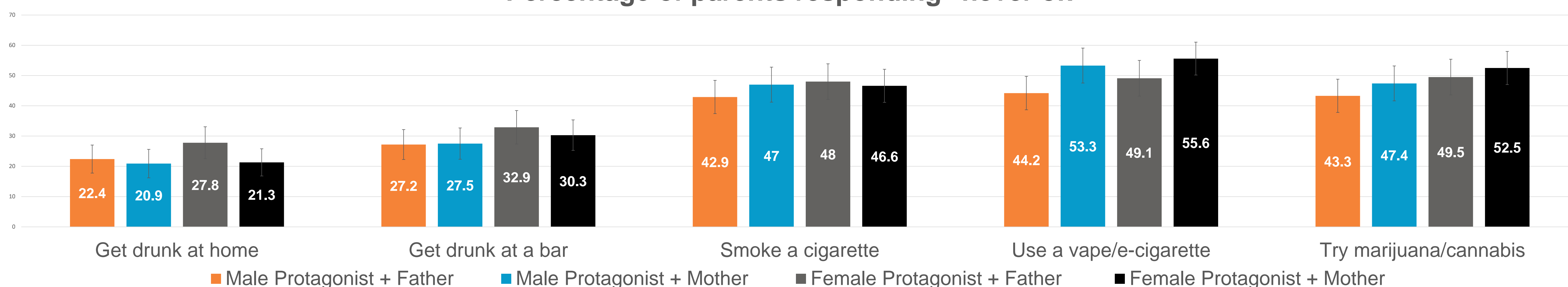
"getting drunk at home", "getting drunk at a bar", "smoking a cigarette", "using a vape/e-cigarette", "trying marijuana/cannabis"

Data analysis

Two-way ANOVA to compare acceptable ages by parent gender and protagonist gender

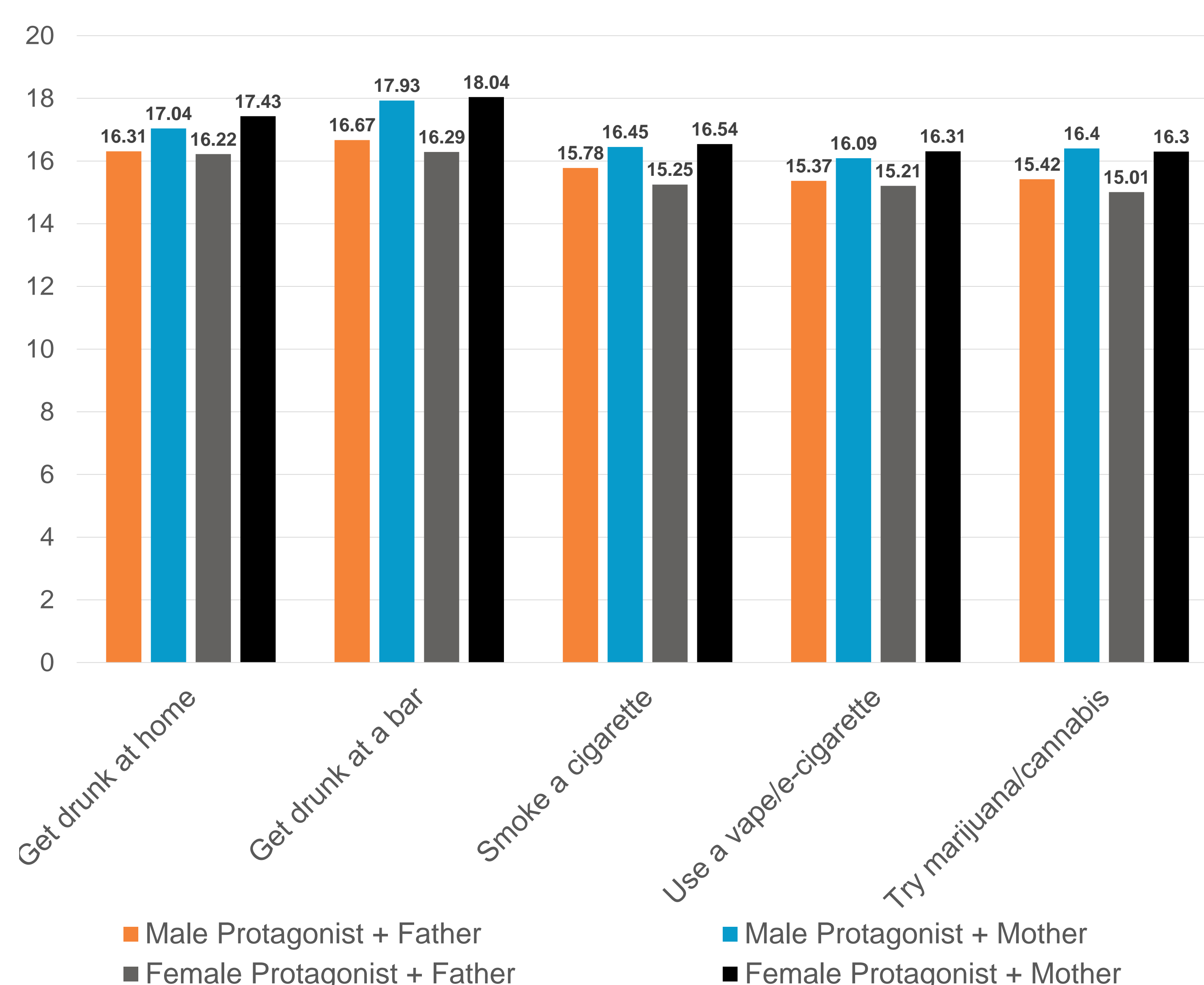
Results

Percentage of parents responding "never ok"



- 20% of parents believe getting drunk at home is 'never ok'
- 50% of parents believe smoking, vaping, and cannabis use is 'never ok'
- Mean acceptable ages** (if not 'never ok'): get drunk at home: 16.8 years; get drunk at a bar: 17.2 years; smoke a cigarette: 16.0 years; use a vape/e-cigarette: 15.7 years; try marijuana/cannabis: 15.8 years
- No significant differences based on adolescent gender
- Mothers report significantly higher acceptable ages than fathers, except for vaping

Mean acceptable ages to engage in behaviours (if not 'never ok')



Discussion & Implications

- Mothers show a more conservative stance on acceptable ages for these five behaviours
- Fathers have more permissive attitudes, accepting lower mean ages for initiation
- These insights suggest a need to prioritise targeted education campaigns focused on fathers' attitudes toward adolescent alcohol and other drug use, to help reduce early initiation of substance use

References: [1] Paglia & Room (1998). Adult opinions on the 'social clock' for teenage behaviour. Journal of Youth Studies, 1(3), 295-314.

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