

Gender effects on the influence of parental alcohol use on children's future drinking behaviour: Insights from the longitudinal study of Australian children (LSAC)

Siobhan O'Dean¹, Tim Slade¹, Cath Chapman¹

¹*The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, University of Sydney, Australia*

Presenter's email: siobhan.odean@sydney.edu.au

Introduction: Research shows that parental harmful alcohol use increases the likelihood of similar behaviors in their children. Studies have explored the gender-specific impacts of parental alcohol use, but results are inconsistent regarding whether maternal or paternal drinking differently affects sons and daughters.

Methods: This study reports on secondary data analysis of Waves 4-6 (age range=8-13) and 8 (age range=18-19) of LSAC. We used logistic and linear regression models to investigate whether mother and/or father's problematic alcohol use prior to child's alcohol initiation was associated with (i) earlier age of alcohol initiation, and (ii) harmful alcohol use (> 10 drinks in the last 7 days), (iii) alcohol related harms at 18-19 years of age. We also investigated whether the effects of mother and father's problematic alcohol use were moderated by the gender of their child.

Results: Adjusting for several socio-demographic and individual difference covariates, both mother's ($b=-0.48$, 95%CI=-0.72, -0.23, $p<.001$) and father's ($b=-0.30$, 95%CI=-0.52, -0.08, $p=.007$) problematic alcohol use were associated with a lower age of alcohol initiation. Both mother's ($b=0.22$, 95%CI=0.07, 0.36, $p=.004$) and father's problematic alcohol use ($b=0.17$, 95%CI=0.04, 0.29, $p=.011$) was positively associated with their child's experience of alcohol-related harms at age 18-19. Mother's, but not father's problematic alcohol use was significantly associated with child's harmful alcohol use at age 18-19 (OR=1.49, 95%CI=1.06, 2.08), $p=.020$. We found little evidence that any of these effects were moderated by the gender of the child ($p>.05$).

Discussions and Conclusions: Both maternal and paternal problematic alcohol use predict poorer alcohol outcomes in their offspring. Maternal alcohol use may be a stronger predictor of harmful drinking behaviour in late adolescence. These effects are consistent across both sons and daughters. These findings emphasise the need for family-focused interventions that address the broader influence of parental drinking habits, regardless of parent and child gender.

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