

Parental monitoring of opposite-gender child may decrease problem drinking in young adults

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Young adults whose parents monitor their social interactions may be less likely to display impulsive behavior traits and to have alcohol-related problems, a new study suggests. The level of monitoring is linked to parenting style, and the link is stronger with the parent of the opposite gender.

This study is one of the first to explore the link between parenting style and parental monitoring, as well as to explore the monitoring style of each parent individually, says Julie A. Patock-Peckham, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of [Psychology](#) & Neuroscience at Baylor University and one of the study authors.

"While there's a plethora of research showing that low parental monitoring contributes to risky behavior, very few researchers have examined the effects of parental monitoring separated out by mothers and fathers," she says. "It's normally measured just with the word 'parent.'"

The study involved 581 college students from the Missouri University of Science and Technology and San Diego State University. Participating students completed a questionnaire that addressed the parenting styles of both their mothers and fathers, perceptions of mothers' and fathers' knowledge of their friendships and social plans, and questions about their own impulsiveness and alcohol-related problems.

Parents were classified as authoritarian (characterized by an emphasis on rules and obedience and a lack of discussion), authoritative (characterized by clear rules and instructions, but with an atmosphere of open discussion), or permissive (characterized by behaving more like a friend than a parent).

Authoritative parents were most likely to do a better job of monitoring (knowing about their child's social life and plans), whereas permissive parents were least likely to effectively monitor their children. Surprisingly, authoritarian parents seemed to have neither an advantage nor a disadvantage in terms of monitoring.

"We expected an atmosphere of rules to play into monitoring," says Patock-Peckham. "But our study shows that having strict house rules does not mean that emerging adults feel that [parents](#) really know about their social life or plans."

When the researchers analyzed the data on gender and monitoring style, a distinct pattern emerged: more parental monitoring by the opposite-gender parent can indirectly reduce alcohol-related problems by buffering impulsiveness.

"It's well known that people who are more impulsive are more likely to struggle with control over their drinking and are more likely to experience alcohol-related problems than their less impulsive counterparts," says Patock-Peckham.

The stronger association with the opposite-gender parent was surprising, says Patock-Peckham. "People seem to think that women or girls will be ok if just their mothers are involved in their lives, and this is really showing that fathers have an impact," she says.

The same is true for mothers having an influence over their sons. The

reasons for these associations are not fully understood.

"It's completely speculative, as this is really a new finding, but I believe it has something to do with the socialization process from one generation to the next," she says. "Perhaps it has something to do with learning how members of the opposite gender view and value certain behaviors."

More information: Patock-Peckham, J. A., King, K. M., Morgan-Lopez, A. A., Ulloa, E. C., & Filson Moses, J. M. (March 2011). Gender-specific mediational links between parenting styles, parental monitoring, impulsiveness, drinking control, and alcohol-related problems. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 72(2), 247-258.

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