

Parents play a powerful role in predicting DUI

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(Medical Xpress) -- Sipping the occasional glass of wine may seem relatively harmless, and could even be beneficial to the drinker's health. But for parents, even moderate drinking can result in one unintended consequence: an increased risk their children will drive under the influence as adults.

Writing in the current issue of the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, University of Florida researchers found that about 6 percent of adolescents whose [parents](#) drank even sporadically reported driving under the influence at age 21, compared with just 2 percent of those whose parents did not imbibe.

"The main idea is that parents' alcohol use has an effect on their kids' behavior," said Mildred Maldonado-Molina, an associate professor of health outcomes and policy with the UF College of Medicine and the lead author of the paper. "It's important for parents to know that their behavior has an effect not only at that developmental age when their kids are adolescents, but also on their future behavior as young adults."

It's typical for parents to worry about the influence of their children's friends and peers, and the study shows that peer behavior can have an effect, particularly on kids who aren't exposed to alcohol at home. Having friends who drink alcohol was a risk factor for driving under the influence for teens whose parents did not drink. Also, kids whose parents and peers consumed alcoholic beverages were especially at risk for driving under the influence. About 11 percent of these teens reported

driving under the influence in their 20s.

But when it comes to influence, parents seem to have more sway than they probably realize, Maldonado-Molina said. According to the study, if a teen's parents were drinkers, what their peers did had less of an impact, though the relationship between peer and parental influence is complex, she said.

"I think it is really important to understand the influence of parents and peers," said Tara Kelley-Baker, a senior research scientist at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation who was not involved with the study. "Parents must understand the influence they have on their children. Some parents just assume they have lost their influence or that they never had it. Research has shown more and more that this is not the case."

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, nearly 10,000 people die because of drunken driving each year.

For the study, UF researchers examined data from nearly 10,000 adolescents that was collected as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The study initially collected data from teens and their parents and then surveyed the children again seven years later.

The influence of peers and parents seemed to affect men and women the same way. The researchers found no significant difference in risk factors between the genders, a surprising discovery. Not as much is known about women and DUI because most studies look at official records and arrests and women are less likely to be charged with DUI than men, though the gap is closing, Maldonado-Molina said.

"Their risk factors are similar and that calls for attention when developing interventions and prevention efforts," Maldonado-Molina

says.

When it comes to curbing DUI, prevention efforts need to start before age 15 to help instill the consequences of getting behind the wheel after drinking alcohol, the researchers say. And education efforts need to include not only children, but their parents as well.

“The home is a really important source for these kids,” Maldonado-Molina said. “(Parents’) may not perceive their drinking as negative, but it influences what is acceptable behavior.”

Provided by University of Florida

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