

# Having authoritarian parents increases the risk of drug use in adolescents

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Alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use is very widespread among youths in Spain compared to the majority of European countries, according to the latest data from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

An international team, led by the European Institute of Studies on Prevention (IREFREA) with headquarters in Mallorca, together with other European and Spanish universities (Oviedo, Santiago de Compostela and Valencia), has analysed the role that parents play at the time of determining the risk of their children using alcohol, tobacco and cannabis in six European countries: Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

The objective was to clarify the type of parent-child relationship that best protects children from taking drugs, using two variables: [parental control](#) and affection.

"Our results support the idea that extremes are not effective: neither authoritarianism nor absence of control and affection. A good relationship with children works well. In this respect, it can go hand in hand with direct control (known as 'authoritative' or democratic style) or not (style wrongly called 'indulgent')," Amador Calafat, main author of the study published in the journal '*Drug and Alcohol Dependence*', declared to SINC.

## **Four family styles according to their relationship with their children**

Classification of families is the result of combining the behaviours adopted by various degrees of demand and responsibility. On the one hand, the authoritative model includes families that "give clear rules and affectionately and flexibly reason with the [children](#) when asking for their compliance".

The authoritarian model coincides with the authoritative model in that both are demanding and controlling, but it differs in that mothers and fathers show less affection.

On the other hand, the fathers and mothers of the neglectful and indulgent models are characterised by their low level of control; however, the former are "scarcely affectionate" and the latter are "very emotional".

The results of the study, which coincide throughout Europe, indicate that the indulgent and authoritative models are those that work best, both for substance use and in personal disorders. "For self-esteem and school performance, it is still better when parents operate with the indulgent style," Calafat continued.

"This study allows a focus and common discussion in Europe in drug use prevention programmes," added the researcher. The results contrast with previous studies conducted in other cultural settings, where parental demand is "recommended" (mostly English-speakers from the USA) or "essential" (Asian cultures).

In total, 7,718 adolescents (3,774 males and 3,944 females), aged between 11 and 19, were interviewed. "From a global personal health

perspective, the 'authoritative' and 'indulgent' parental styles equally protect against the use of drugs," Calafat said.

Until now, this last observation was exclusively associated with Mediterranean and South American countries. "However we also see that it is valid for many European countries," added the IREFREA researcher.

**More information:** Amador Calafat, Fernando García, Montse Juan, Elisardo Becoña, José Ramón Fernández-Hermida. "Which parenting style is more protective against adolescent substance use? Evidence within the European context". *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 138, 185-192.

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