

Frequent drinkers are more likely to neglect supervising their children

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Adults who drink alcoholic beverages frequently are more likely to inadequately supervise their children, according to a study led by a UCLA researcher.

The research, which was [published](#) (PDF) in the peer-reviewed journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, also found that frequent drinkers were less likely than others to physically neglect their children—defined as failing to provide food, medical care and other physical needs for the child. However, the more [alcohol](#) parents consume each time they drink, the more likely they are to show behavior consistent with physical neglect, such as not keeping the house warm enough.

Put another way, frequent drinkers are more likely to fail to provide adequate care for their children, and heavy drinkers are more likely to leave a child unsupervised at home or in a car, said Bridget Freisthler, professor of social welfare at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

The researchers write that 500,000 children were victims of neglect in 2011, citing Child Protective Services statistics, and that alcohol is a factor in more than 11 percent of child neglect cases. But they said little is known about the relationship between alcohol use and neglectful parenting.

Most research on the subject has focused on [alcohol dependence](#), [alcohol abuse](#) and quantity of alcohol consumed, rather than on drinking

frequency or social contexts. The researchers attempted to fill that gap by examining five different drinking contexts and how they do or do not contribute to [child neglect](#).

They interviewed 2,152 California parents who had children 12 or under and who had reported [drinking alcohol](#) in the past year.

The study found that the social contexts in which parents drink played distinct roles in whether and how parents neglected their children. For example, those who drank more often with friends were more likely to leave their children home alone, while those who drank with family members were more likely unsafely monitor their children. Frequency and continued volumes of drinking in any context were not found to be related to parents' reports of insufficient food or heat in the house.

"We found that no single drinking context is universally problematic in terms of either supervisory or physical neglect," Freisthler said. "To help protect children, we need more detailed research into the relationships between [alcohol consumption](#), behavioral patterns and types of neglect."

More information: The study is available online:
alcalc.oxfordjournals.org/content/31.1/031.full.pdf

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