

# Parental attention can reduce risk of drug abuse in adolescence

December 5 2017

---



Survey of more than 6,000 teenagers reinforces protective function of rule-keeping. Findings also show that well-off school students drink most . Credit: Rebcenter / Wikimedia

Children required by parents to follow rules and discuss their activities have fewer problems when they enter adolescence, such as abuse of alcohol and other drugs. The likelihood of such problems is further reduced when parents explain what the rules are for and are supportive when they experience difficulties. In the literature, this parenting style is called responsiveness.

The research project that produced these findings was conducted at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), surveying 6,381 children aged 11 to 15 in six Brazilian cities. The results have just been published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

"The key conclusion is that [parenting style](#) can be a protective factor or a risk factor for the consumption of alcohol and other drugs in adolescence. This means the [drug abuse prevention](#) programs implemented by schools should not just raise the children's awareness but also focus on training parenting skills," said Zila Sanchez, a professor at EPM-UNIFESP and principal investigator for the project.

Data collection took place at 62 public schools in Tubarão and Florianópolis, Santa Catarina State; São Paulo and São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo State; Fortaleza, Ceará State; and Brasília, in the Federal District. The subjects were seventh- and eighth-grade primary school students with an average age of 12.5.

"We opted to work with schoolchildren in their early teens in order to find out whether parenting style influences substance abuse at the start of adolescence," Sanchez said. "Because prevalence of consumption is very low when they're so young, our questionnaire asked if they had used drugs at least once in the previous year."

## **Research crosses parental and drug use profiles**

The questionnaire was administered by researchers in the classroom without the presence of teachers in order to avoid inhibition and embarrassment. Participants completed it themselves and placed it anonymously in a brown envelope. In addition to drug use, it also asked about how the adolescents perceived their parents (parenting style), socioeconomic conditions, sexual behavior, and school violence, among other topics.

The responses were analyzed during Juliana Valente's Ph.D. research, with a scholarship from FAPESP and supervision by Sanchez.

A statistical model called latent class analysis was used to identify three groups with similar patterns of drug use. "Abstainers/low users" were the most prevalent, accounting for 81.54 percent of the sample, followed by "alcohol users/binge drinkers" at 16.65 percent. "Polydrug users," who reported using tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, crack and/or inhalants such as benzene or glue in the previous year, as well as alcohol, accounted for 1.8 percent.

"The next step was to see if parenting styles were associated with any of these drug use profiles," Sanchez explained. "To this end, parenting styles were analyzed in four different groups, in accordance with the adolescents' own assessment and criteria established in the scientific literature."

Based on an assessment scale widely used in international studies and validated in Brazil, parental profiles were scored according to "demandingness," which relates to the degree to which parents monitor their children's activities and require them to follow rules, and "responsiveness," relating to the degree of parental sensitivity to children's needs and openness to dialogue.

Parents with high scores in both domains were classified as "authoritative." Those with high scores in demandingness alone were classified as "authoritarian." Responsive parents who neither monitored their children's activities nor required rule-keeping were considered "indulgent." Finally, parents with low scores in both domains were classified as "neglectful."

In line with the findings of surveys performed in other countries, the "authoritative" style was the most protective, followed by the

"authoritarian" and "indulgent" styles. As the researchers note in the article, "neglectful" parents put adolescents at greater risk of belonging to the two classes of drug user identified by the study: alcohol users/binge drinkers, and polydrug users.

"The fact that an 'authoritative' style is more protective and a 'neglectful' style is riskier was expected, but there was disagreement about the 'authoritarian' and 'indulgent' styles in the literature. It wasn't clear which was better. The findings of our study reinforce the idea that demandingness, in the sense of more parental monitoring and use of rules, is a [style](#) that protects adolescents by preventing drug consumption," Valente said.

## **Well-off adolescents drink most**

The researchers were particularly struck by the finding that the higher the interviewees' social class, the more likely they were to belong to the binge drinker or polydrug user group. According to Sanchez, this result runs counter to those of surveys conducted in the US and Europe, where poverty is considered a risk factor for binge drinking and drug abuse in adolescence. On the other hand, it matches the findings of previous studies of the same age group conducted in Brazil.

"This is a very intriguing result and shows we can't simply import data relating to [risk factors](#) and protection for use in [prevention programs](#) here without taking cultural differences into account," Sanchez said.

For Valente, the statistical analysis did not support a link between different parenting styles and specific social classes because parenting styles were evenly distributed across household income brackets.

Data collection took place in late 2014 as part of a project funded by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which commissioned the UNIFESP

researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of a [drug](#) use prevention program called #Tamojunto in 62 selected schools.

"The program was brought from Europe, where it achieved good results, and adapted by the Ministry of Health," Valente said. "It was designed not just to convey knowledge of drugs to adolescents but also to develop personal and interpersonal skills. Here in Brazil, however, we didn't observe effectiveness based on the same metrics as in Europe."

According to Sanchez, the data analyzed during Valente's PhD and used as a basis for the article just published were collected before implementation of the program #Tamojunto and have no relation to its results.

**More information:** Juliana Y. Valente et al, Gradient of association between parenting styles and patterns of drug use in adolescence: A latent class analysis, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2017.08.015](#)

Provided by FAPESP

Citation: Parental attention can reduce risk of drug abuse in adolescence (2017, December 5) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-parental-attention-drug-abuse-adolescence.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--