

the relationship between drinking and violence in an adolescent population: does gender matter?

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While many studies have examined the relationship between alcohol and violence in adult populations, little research has examined this relationship in adolescent populations. Using a large nationally representative sample of older adolescents from the Monitoring the Future Survey, this article found heavy alcohol and polydrug use to increase the likelihood of violent offending even after controlling for other variables like home environment, grades in school, and race. When separate models predicting violence were examined for both males and females, alcohol and polydrug use continued to increase the likelihood of violence for both sexes. Attaining high grades in school decreased the likelihood of violence for both males and females. Several differences did emerge across gender-specific models for other variables, however. African-American males were more likely to engage in violence compared to White males, but race was not a significant predictor of violence

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in the female sample. In addition, residing in a two-parent household significantly decreased the likelihood of violence only for females.

INTRODUCTION

Historical data indicate that no other group has witnessed such a rapid increase in rates of violence as the one observed for adolescents during the early 1990s (Cook and Laub 1998; Perkins 1997; Snyder 1996). This trend spawned a proliferation of research attempting to determine the etiological factors related to

studies within subsets of the population (e.g., victims and offenders) and laboratory experimental studies.

Correlational studies examining the prevalence of alcohol within offender populations have found that offenders were under the influence of alcohol in 28–86% of the incidents of homicide, 24–72% of assaults (Roizen, 1982), and 13–50% of rapes (Roizen 1997). This wide variability in estimates, Roizen (1997) believes may be attributable to a number of factors including the use of small sample sizes in some studies and the quality of police data across jurisdictions. Another perplexing finding is that nonviolent offenders were just as likely to have been under the influence of alcohol as their violent cohorts. For example, a survey of prison inmates in the early 1970s indicated that although a large proportion of violent offenders were drinking or drunk at the time of their crime, ther

demonstration that alcohol was more pervasive within particular subsets of violent incidents. For example, alcohol involvement was present in over half of all episodes of male perpetrated violence but in only 27% of female perpetrated violence. Alcohol presence also varied by the victim-offender relationship; over three quarters of the incidents involving strangers and nearly half of the incidents of spouse assault involved drinking by either the victim or the assailant. The high prevalence of alcohol involvement in intimate partner violence is confirmed by other research as well (Kaufman Kanter 1997; Kaufman Kanter and Straus 1987).

Pernanen's (1991) work encouraged others to better specify the context of the violent incident under study. For example, Martin and Bachman (1997) found that the effects of assailant drinking on the escalation (from threat to actual attack) and outcome (injury versus no injury) of assaults varied by gender and victim-offender relationship. After controlling for other important factors like weapon presence and location of the incident, these authors found that alcohol had little effect either on the likelihood of a threat escalating to an attack or on it resulting in injury in assaults involving acquaintances of either sex. Alcohol did, however, increase the likelihood that a threat would escalate to an attack in male-on-male incidents involving strangers. In addition, it was found that attacks against women by a male intimate (e.g., husband or boyfriend) were more likely to result in injury if the assailant had been drinking.

None of the above correlational studies, of course, establish a causal relationship between the use of alcohol and intentional violence. Experimental studies do, however, illuminate the possibility that alcohol consumption may have a distinct causal influence on subsequent violent behavior.

A large proportion of experimental studies 1108390sbehavioro603

and Cooper 1990), particularly under conditions of frustration and provocation (Taylor and Leonard 1983). Unlike the correlational studies discussed above, these experimental studies have the advantage of permitting inferences about causation because of their random assignment to the experimental manipulation, the consumption of alcohol. However, due to the artificiality of both the drinking situation and the operationalization of aggression, they have limited generalizability outside the laboratory setting (Lang 1993).

As noted above, there is a paucity of research that has examined the alcohol–violence connection within adolescent populations (for a review, see White 1997). The largest survey to illuminate this relationship is the National Youth Survey (NYS). Using the NYS, Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard (1989) found that self-reported alcohol use by 11–17 year olds immediately prior to committing an offense was 23% for assaults (including fights), 10% for robberies, and 20% for motor vehicle thefts. Note that this is a similar lack of specificity that was found for alcohol's involvement across offense types in adult populations. Elliott and colleagues did, however, find that violent behavior increased for those youth who used other drugs in addition to alcohol. In another correlational study, Carpenter (1988) found that youth who engaged in alcohol and drug use were more likely to be involved in violence. In addition to finding this relationship between alcohol and violence, Glassner and Johnson (1988) also found that youth who drank heavily were more likely to be not only perpetrators of violence, but also victims of it. Other researchers have also found a positive correlation between drinking and violence within adolescent populations (Orpinas et al. 1995; Valois, 1993).

Research has also investigated the contribution of alcohol and drugs in crimes committed by juveniles. Using data from adole

investigated the alcohol–violence relationship with an adolescent sample in an experimental setting.

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Many experimenta

(Brown et al. 1980; Leigh 1987). Other studies have found that men were more likely than women to say that they physically injured another person or damaged property due to drinking (Perkins 1992) or to list alcohol as a cause of aggression (Crawford 1984). The males and females in Perkins' (1992) study, however, were equally likely to relate alcohol to physical harm to oneself.

Other insights about the differential effects of alcohol on violence between males and females comes from an ethnographic study using a sample of 152 male and 133 female drug users distributors in New York City b4N]TJ100]T100111[(a)22pb(n).

created indicating the presence of any of the following behaviors: used alcohol on more than 6 occasions in the last 12 months; perceived themselves to have gotten drunk on most of those occasions; and used alcohol more than three times in the last two weeks. If respondents replied yes to a question, this drinking variable was coded 1. Otherwise the variable was coded 0. The criteria we chose for this alcohol use measure would be considered conservative because it reflects heavier drinking styles. This was done to ensure that our analyses were based on a sample of individuals who were familiar with alcohol and its effects, not those who had virtually no experience with alcohol. Forty-three percent of the sample engaged in frequent and heavy alcohol use as measured by this variable. It should be noted that in addition to this variable, another variable that simply measured the quantity and frequency of drinking behavior

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TABLE 2 Percent of Respondents who Engaged in Any Violence in the Last 12 Months by Demographics, Drinking Index, and Polydrug Use

	Percent of all respondents using violence	Percent of males using violence	Percent of females using violence
Female	17*		
Male	32		
White	23	30*	16
African-American	24	38	12
Two-parent household	22*	29*	14*
Single-parent household	30	39	22
Parents attended college	22	30	15
Parents did not attend college	28	36	20
Respondent engaged in alcohol use	36*	46**	25**
Did not engage in alcohol use	16	20	11
Respondent engaged in polydrug use	38**	47**	28**
Did not engage in polydrug use	16	21	11

Note: **Coefficient significant at the $p < .01$ level; * $p < .05$ level.

students residing in households with both parents present were less likely to use violence compared to those residing with only one parent; respondents who engaged in heavy and frequent alcohol use were more likely to use violence compared to those who did not use alcohol to such an extent; and respondents who used at least one other drug in addition to alcohol in the past 12 months were more likely to use violence compared to those who did not engage in polydrug use.

In general, these same relationships were true for both male and female subsamples. In addition, however, race was a significant predictor of violence for males. African-American males were more likely to disclose that they had engaged in violence in the past 12 months compared to their White counterparts.

The next question addressed was, "Do these same variables predict violent behavior for males and females even after controlling for the effects of the other variables?" Results of the

logistic regression model predicting violence for the total sample and for the male and female subsamples are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, results are very consistent with the bivariate relationships observed earlier. Fo

use retained their significance even after controlling for the effects of the other independent variables. Heavy and frequent alcohol users as well as students who used at least one other drug in addition to alcohol were more likely to engage in violent behavior compared to other students.

In general, the gender-specific models predicting violence revealed very similar results. Alcohol and polydrug use increased the probability that adolescent males and females would engage in violent activities. There were

In addition, we have examined whether there were differential effects of alcohol on violence between male and female adolescents. In the general model predicting violence, heavy alcohol and polydrug use both increased the likelihood of violent offending even after controlling for the other variables. Consistent with other research, our findings indicate that males were more likely to engage in violence compared to females. Other factors that decreased the likelihood of violence were high grades in school and residing in a household with two parents present.

Unlike previous research, then, which indicates alcohol may be more related to violence for males compared to females (Crawford 1984; Perkins 1992; Spunt et al. 1990), our research indicates that alcohol and drug use increased the likelihood of violence for both male and female adolescents. In fact, the gender specific models predicting violence were very similar. Heavy alcohol and polydrug use increased the likelihood that both male and female adolescents engaged in violence, regardless of the other variables. Similarly, high grades in school decreased the likelihood of both males and females engaging in violence. The effects of other variables, however, were different across the models. First, African-American males were more likely to report using violence compared to White males, but race was not a significant predictor of violence in the female sample. In addition, females who had at least one parent who had attended college were more likely to engage in violence compared to other females. This was not true for the male sample. While residing in a two-parent household decreased the probability of violence for both male and female adolescents, the effect was only

than being African-American and male. Our finding that males are generally more likely to engage in violent behavior, which once again confirms the proliferation of research that already exists (Reiss and Roth 1993), needs to be addressed at the sociological level. The socialization of men that legitimates the use of violence appears to spawn dangerous violent behavior. This is clearly a problem that resides at the level of gendered attitudes, norms, and expectations (O'Toole and Schiffman 1997).

Finally, the advertising of alcoholic products to adolescents and adolescents' subsequent use of alcoholic beverages may be an indirect factor related to the rates of violence we see in adolescent populations. This issue must be addressed in subsequent research and in public policy initiatives. The movement to hold alcohol and tobacco industries accountable for their efforts at targeting youth in marketing initiatives appears to be justified by the current research.

Pittman, D. J. and H. R. White, eds. 1991. *Society, Culture, and Drinking Patterns Reexamined*. New