




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Depression and conduct problems mediate the protective relationship of parental support on black adolescents' alcohol use

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Initiating alcohol use before age 14 is one of the strongest predictors of developing a substance use disorder (SUD) later in life (Grant & Dawson, 1998). Despite this risk, alcohol use among American 8th graders remains prevalent, with 13.5% of Blacks and 15.8% of Whites reporting use in the past 30 days (Johnston et al., 2009). Although fewer Black than White adolescents report alcohol use, prevalence differences mask an important paradox. Black adolescents who use alcohol experience significantly higher rates of subsequent alcohol-related problems such as alcohol use disorder and school dropout than Whites (Reardon & Buka, 2002), making alcohol use by Black adolescents a major public health concern. Conduct problems and depression are known predictors of alcohol use and also typically precede alcohol use onset in adolescence (Kuperman et al., 2001). Parent support has been found to protect against both substance use and mental health problems during adolescence (Pilgrim et al., 2006). However, due to underrepresentation of Black adolescents in much of the extant etiological literature, risk and protective factors associated with their substance use or abstention require further study (Szapocznik et al., 2007). The present study examines this question among Black adolescents in two datasets, a nationally representative sample and a selected high-risk sample.

Structural equation modeling was used to examine parent support as a predictor of depression, conduct problems, and substance use, with depression and conduct problems as mediators of the relationship of parent support to substance use. Participants are a) Black adolescents (N=13,962, modal age 14, 54% female) from Monitoring the Future (MTF), a nationally representative survey of American adolescents; and b) (N=432, modal age 14, 51% female) high-risk, urban Black adolescents from SCHOO-BE, an ongoing in-depth longitudinal study.

In both samples, parent support negatively related to adolescents' alcohol use, depression, and conduct problems; depression and conduct problems positively related to alcohol use. In the MTF sample, the relationship of parent support to alcohol use was partially mediated by conduct problems ($Z=-11.1$, $p<.05$) and depression ($Z=-7.0$, $p<.05$). In the SCHOO-BE sample, this relationship was mediated by conduct problems ($Z=-2.1$, $p<.05$) but not depression ($Z=-1.4$, $p>.05$).

This study demonstrates the role of parent support in protecting against early alcohol use via its protection against conduct problems and depression in both a nationally representative sample and a high-risk sample of Black adolescents. Specific implications for further multi-study analyses and for preventive interventions targeting parent support are discussed.