

Relationships among parental monitoring and sensation seeking on the development of substance use disorder among college students

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Researchers studying a group of 1,253 first-year college students found that individuals meeting criteria for alcohol dependence had experienced significantly lower levels of parental monitoring during high school, meaning that their parents were less involved in keeping track of their whereabouts, friends, and activities. Researchers also found that a high level of sensation seeking was associated with alcohol dependence. Sensation seeking is a general propensity for thrills, excitement, and novelty, and has been consistently linked to alcohol and drug use in numerous studies of adolescents and college students. Furthermore, the association between parental monitoring and alcohol dependence held true even controlling for sensation seeking, demographics, and other background variables. The relationships between parental monitoring and sensation seeking and cannabis dependence were also examined. Researchers found that sensation seeking, but not parental monitoring, was associated with cannabis dependence during college.

Because this is not a prospective study, the relationships observed between sensation seeking and parental monitoring and substance dependence cannot be considered causal. However, researchers suggested three possible mechanisms for how parental monitoring might decrease risk for alcohol dependence. First, high levels of parental monitoring during high school might lower the chances for the adolescent to affiliate with peers who use substances. It is well known that peers can influence risk for drug involvement. Second, helping an adolescent minimize those affiliations could instill long-lasting values, beliefs, and skills for selecting friends who do not drink, and that pattern could persist throughout college. Finally, it is possible that parents who are highly involved in their child's life during high school might continue to do so when the child enters college, which might include having conversations with them about negative alcohol-related consequences such as drunk driving, alcohol poisoning, or poor grades. The researchers speculate that the latter of the three mechanisms offers the best explanation for the finding that parental monitoring was not associated with cannabis dependence: cannabis-related conversations might be less common than alcohol-related conversations, even among students who had a high level of parental monitoring.

Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



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Practice and Policy Suggestions: Results of this study emphasize the proactive role parents can have in reducing their child's risk for alcohol problems even after they leave home for college. These findings encourage parents to monitor and supervise teen activities and whereabouts during high school to reduce chances of alcohol problems. Sensation-seeking appears to be another risk factor for alcohol and cannabis dependence. Assessments that include measures of sensation-seeking could be useful to identify individuals at risk for substance use disorders during college.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Kaynak, Ö., Meyers, K., Caldeira, K.M., Vincent, K.B., Winters, K.C., Arria, A.M. (2013). Relationships among parental monitoring and sensation seeking on the development of substance use disorder among college students. *Addictive Behaviors*. 38(1), 1457-1463. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2012.08.003



About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first-time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.^{1,2} Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit www.cls.umd.edu or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland School of Public Health at aarria@umd.edu.

¹ Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O'Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38.

² Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O'Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. 6(1), 56-72.

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