

# Adolescent Delinquency and Parent-Adolescent Relations

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## Abstract

The present study is aimed at examining these effects of poor parent-adolescent relationships in regard to juvenile delinquency. Based off indications from extensive previous research, it is hypothesized that parent substance abuse as well as the lack of positive parenting are associated with a greater likelihood of juvenile delinquency. This study is part of Dr. Christine McCauley Ohannessian’s ongoing Adolescent Adjustment Project of high school students and their parents. The various measures that analyzed adolescent-parent communication and parent drinking as well as adolescent alcohol consumption revealed interesting gendered differences. As speculated, girls were less likely to consume alcohol frequently when their parents and low levels of alcohol consumption and had higher levels of communication with their parents. However, with boys there was no significant relationship between communication and alcohol consumption. In respect to parent alcohol consumption, boys were only affected by their father’s drinking while girls had a significant relationship with both. This poses important gender implications within the family context in regard to juvenile delinquency that could be further researched.

## Sample

- 1,001 adolescent boys and girls (53% girls)
- 57% Caucasian; 22% African-American; 12% Hispanic; 2% Asian
- Mean age = 16.09 (SD=.68)
- Participants were in 10th or 11th grade and attending a public high school in Delaware
- The majority of the adolescents lived with their biological parents; 89% lived with their biological mother and 61% lived with their biological father

## Measures

### Adolescent Alcohol Consumption

A self report was created to measure the adolescent's alcohol consumption. They were asked, “When you had beer/wine/liquor, *on the average day*, how much did you usually drink in the *last six months*?” The students were asked to state independently how much beer, wine, and liquor they had per day. The scores for the three types of alcohol were added up to produce a total consumption score.

## Measures

### Parental Alcoholism

A version of the Short Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (SMAST; Crews & Sher, 1992) was used to evaluate both the mother and father’s alcohol intake. Nine items were included to asses the adolescent’s perception of their parents drinking. These items related to problems that would be related to alcohol abuse such as attending alcoholics anonymous or being arrested for intoxication. The adolescent responds by a “yes” or “no.” The responses are then coded by 0=no and 1=yes. The items were then added up for both the mother and the father separately for their continuous total scores. Previous research has shown that SMAST exhibits high reliability and validity for parent alcohol abuse., Furthermore, the research has provided data that proves the child’s perception of their parent’s drinking is very similar to the parents own reports.

### Adolescent-Parent Communication

In order to measure the relationship between the adolescent and their parents, the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (Barnes and Olsen, 2003) was used. This 20-iten evaluation includes two subscales, one accounting for the negative family communication and the other for the positive. The negative communication scale assesses the problematic interaction patterns and the adolescent’s fear to speak openly with their parents. The items include statements such as, “My mother/father has a tendency to say things to me which would be better left unsaid.” The other subscale gages the open communication and interaction among the family. It measures the feelings of free exchanges and understanding within the family. This subscale includes items such as, “I find it easy to discuss problems with my mother/father. Both response scales items are on a five point range from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*. In the Adolescent Adjustment Project, the student filled out this for their mother and father individually. Higher scores relate to better family communication. Previous studies have found this measure to have high validity.

## Procedures

In the spring of 2007, the adolescents who agreed and parents gave consent, were given a self-report survey in school by trained research personnel. The students finished the survey in about forty minutes. As an incentive, the students were rewarded free movie passes after they completed the survey.

## Results

Bivariate correlations were used to analyze the relationships between: parental alcohol use, adolescent alcohol consumption frequency, and parent-adolescent communication split into the twos subscales of problems and openness. These correlations were conducted by gender.

### Parental Alcohol Use

For males, there was a strong relationship (.146) found between father alcohol consumption and the adolescent male’s consumption Frequency. There was no significant relationship found between adolescent male’s consumption frequency and their mother’s alcohol consumption. Conversely, females alcohol consumption frequency had a significant correlation for both their parent’s alcohol intake but the father’s was stronger (.197) than the mother’s (.105).

### Adolescent-Parent Communication

#### Problems

For males, there is no significant correlation between their alcohol consumption frequency and communication problems between both mother (-.024) and fathers (.048). Females also showed no strong association between father communication problems (-.002) and alcohol consumption.. However, communication problems with mother’s portrays a significant relationship for females alcohol consumption frequency (.132).

#### Openness

For males, the adolescent’s open communication with both their mothers (-.024) and fathers (-.095) did not have any significant association with their alcohol consumption frequency. However, there was a significant negative relationship (-.150) between the adolescent female’s alcohol consumption frequency and open communication with mothers. The females, like the males, lacked the strong correlation between father openness and alcohol consumption frequency (.015).

Variables	Means and Standard Deviations			
	Males		Females	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Alcohol Consumption	-.8975	1.8074	-.7763	1.79120
Father Alcohol Consumption	-1.6304	1.35131	-1.3647	1.52315
Mother Alcohol Consumption	-2.0858	.80665	-2.0371	.85491
Father Comm. Problems	27.3447	8.63050	27.5874	8.40924
Father Open Comm.	31.6771	10.75650	31.1956	11.50196
Father Comm. Total	64.3898	15.49948	63.6186	16.73582
Mother Comm. Problems	66.7810	14.04773	67.3248	16.32864
Mother Open Comm.	35.2035	9.34966	35.8433	10.13669
Mother Comm. Total	66.7810	14.04773	67.3248	16.32863

Table 1  
Male Correlations among Study Variables

<i>Measure</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Adolescent Alcohol Frequency								
2. F Communication Problems	.048							
3. F Communication Openness	-.095	-.262**						
4. F Communication Total	-.095	-.741**	.842**					
5. M Communication Problems	-.024	.433**	-.121*	-.334**				
6. M Communication Openness	-.021	-.047	.326**	.268	.394**			
7. M Communication Total	-.017	-.257**	.273**	.344**	-.790**	.874**		
8. Father Alcohol Use	.146**	.108*	-.226**	-.219**	.093	-.076	.099*	
9. Mother Alcohol Use	.076	.188*	.012	-.108*	.119*	-.055*	-.109*	.175**

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<.001$ .

Table 1  
Female Correlations among Study Variables

<i>Measure</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Adolescent Alcohol Frequency								
2. F Communication Problems	-.002							
3. F Communication Openness	.015	-.392**						
4. F Communication Total	.015	-.773**	.887**					
5. M Communication Problems	.132**	-.347**	-.079	-.231**				
6. M Communication Openness	-.150**	-.074	.160**	.145**	-.579**			
7. M Communication Total	-.162**	-.221**	.142**	.913**	-.790**	-.862**		
8. Father Alcohol Use	.197**	.119*	-.121**	-.143**	.115*	-.166**	-.161**	
9. Mother Alcohol Use	.105*	.043	.007	-.095*	-.104*	.094*	-.104*	-.170**

## Conclusions

As hypothesized, the results exemplified strong relationships with parent-adolescent communication and parent alcohol consumption regard to adolescent alcohol consumption frequency. However, there were great gender differences between the adolescents within each measure. For females, the more the parents drank, the more inclined the adolescent is to consume alcohol. Unlike the females, the males alcohol consumption is only affected by their fathers alcohol intake. The communication measures was the strongest portrayal of the gendered disparities within the study. Both the Problem and openness subscales for mother and father were found to have no significant influence on the males alcohol consumption. In contrast, higher levels of problems in mother-daughter communication increased females probability to consume alcohol more frequently and higher levels of openness decreased this likelihood. It can be inferred by these correlations that the effects of parental drinking and parent-adolescent communications impact female adolescents more than the males. This distinction may serve as a foundation to promote gendered research within the juvenile delinquency field.