



The Influence of Parental Actions on Adolescent Health Risk Behaviors: Findings From A National Data Set



Lauren Munter, BSNc, Class of 2019
M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing

BACKGROUND

The health of adolescents and young adults is positively linked to learned health behaviors. Increased risk behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes can have a lasting impact on both short-term and long-term health.

Adolescents who report drinking alcohol are more likely to smoke and to carry a weapon. Binge drinking during both adolescence and young adulthood were predictive of likelihood of arrest 8-14 years later.

Adolescents who smoke cigarettes are more likely than nonsmokers to use alcohol, marijuana, and experiment with drugs.



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine if parental alcohol use and cigarette smoking had an impact on their adolescent health risk taking.

RESULTS

Parental health risk taking behaviors influenced adolescent risk taking across all four waves of data (1994 to 2008)

Alcohol Use:

- Adolescents who drink alcohol were more likely to have an parent who drinks ($p=.0001$)
- As the frequency of drinking increases in parents, the incidence of drinking increases in adolescents ($p=.0001$)
- Adolescents who binge drink (5+ drinks a day) were more likely to have a parent who binge drinks across all four waves ($p= .000$)

Cigarette Smoking:

- Adolescents who regularly smoke were more likely to have a parent who smokes
 - Wave I: 27.8% of adolescents ($p=.0001$)
 - Wave II: 80.1% of adolescents ($p=.000$)
 - Wave III: 53.3% of adolescents ($p=.000$)
 - Wave IV: 59.% of adolescents ($p= .001$)
- Adolescents who smoke (51.8%) were more likely to have parents who said they did not ($p= .001$), suggesting that parents are unaware of their child's risk behaviors.

METHODS

A secondary analysis of four waves of data (1994 to 2008) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) was undertaken using a national sample of 16,388 adolescents and parents.



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CONCLUSIONS

- Parental health behaviors influence the risk taking of adolescents as they age into young adulthood.
- Healthcare professionals, social service providers, and educators must identify and screen for at risk adolescents.
- Educational programs aimed at reducing health risk in adolescents must also include parents to diminish risk factors and enhance protective factors.
- Promoting healthy behaviors around alcohol and cigarette use in parents can influence the health outcomes of their children.