

Examining the Relationship Between Parental Social Drinking and High School Students' Attitudes Toward Underage Drinking

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ABSTRACT

The problem of underage drinking in the United States is a serious public health concern. Parental influence is considered one of the major factors associated with adolescents' attitudes toward underage drinking. This study examined the relationship between parents' social drinking behaviors and high school students' attitudes toward underage drinking. A cross-sectional mixed-methods survey design collected quantitative and qualitative data through anonymous surveys administered to high school students and parents of high school students in the United States. A total of 217 participants were included in the final analysis, consisting of 143 high school students in grades 9-12 and 74 parents. Most high school students reported observing their parents drinking in social environments but reported that these behaviors had little or no impact on their attitudes toward underage drinking. In contrast, most parents believed that their social drinking behaviors strongly influenced their children's attitudes. Inferential analysis identified a statistically significant association between greater reported exposure to parental social drinking and more accepting student attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. These findings suggest a perception gap between parents and high school students regarding the impact of parents' drinking behavior. High school students may separate adult behavior from their own decision-making more than parents assume. Therefore, modeling behavior alone may not be sufficient to shape students' attitudes toward alcohol, while open communication about expectations, responsibility, and consequences may play a more significant role. These results emphasize the importance of considering both parent and high school student perspectives when addressing underage drinking prevention strategies.

Keywords: adolescent alcohol use; parental influence; social drinking; underage drinking; high school students; alcohol attitudes; parental modeling

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "12.7 million people ages 12 to 20 (32.9% in this age group) reported that they have had at least one [alcoholic] drink in their lives" (1). Despite the legal drinking age of 21 in the United States, underage alcohol consumption persists, and adolescents will ultimately face the consequences. To highlight the dangers of underage drinking, the Medical College of Wisconsin reports, "In the U.S., underage

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drinking contributes annually to more than 3,500 deaths among people under 21, about 190,000 emergency department visits by people under 21 for injuries and other conditions linked to alcohol, and about \$30 billion in economic costs” (2). These consequences demonstrate the importance of understanding factors that may be associated with adolescents’ attitudes toward alcohol, including parental behaviors. Existing research has identified several ways in which parental behaviors may be associated with adolescents’ attitudes toward alcohol. Bohm and Esser reported that “adolescents whose parents drank frequently (≥ 5 days/month), or binge drank, had significantly higher odds of drinking than adolescents whose parents did not drink or did not binge drink, respectively” (3). When adolescents see their parents consume alcohol socially or as part of their daily routine, they may begin to view alcohol as normal behavior. To further explain why adolescents may model their parents’ behavior, the social learning theory provides important insight. McLeod explains that “social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, suggests that people learn by observing others. It emphasizes the importance of imitation, modeling, and reinforcement in the learning process” (4). Parental communication may also be associated with adolescents’ attitudes toward alcohol. Cox *et al.* explain that “parental drinking modified the influence of parental cautionary messages on alcohol use such that the effect was particularly salient for those youth who witnessed and whose parents reported higher levels of alcohol use” (5). Bohn similarly found that greater perceived parental approval of drinking was associated with greater alcohol consumption among students (6). The quality of parent-child relationships may also affect alcohol use, with strong relationships potentially serving as a protective factor while also increasing opportunities for parental behaviors to be modeled (7). Parental permissiveness represents another factor associated with adolescent alcohol use. Bohm and Esser explain that “access to substances in the home, parents allowing children to drink, or parental provision of alcohol are associated with earlier initiation and alcohol problems” (3). According to Pereda, “Children and teenagers of any age who sip or taste alcohol with their parents’ permission are more likely to engage in risky drinking in young adulthood” (8). Staff and Maggs also found that adolescents who were allowed to drink were more likely to transition quickly from their first drink to heavier alcohol consumption (9). Furthermore, Yap *et al.* conducted a meta-analysis showing that the “risk of adolescent alcohol misuse is positively associated

with parental provision of alcohol, favourable parental attitudes towards alcohol use and parental drinking” (10). Together, these findings demonstrate that parental modeling, communication, and permissiveness may all be associated with adolescents’ attitudes and behaviors toward alcohol. Although much research examines underage drinking and general parental influences, a crucial gap remains in understanding the relationship between parents’ social drinking habits and high school students’ attitudes toward alcohol. Much of the existing research focuses on general parental drinking, parental provision of alcohol, or adolescent drinking behavior rather than specifically examining parental social drinking and students’ attitudes toward underage alcohol use. This study examined the relationship between parents’ behavior when drinking in social environments and the attitudes high school students form about alcohol in the United States. Religious factors were excluded to maintain the study’s focus on social drinking behaviors. The researcher hypothesized that high school students who consistently observe their parents consuming alcohol in social settings would perceive underage alcohol use as more acceptable.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods survey design to examine the relationship between parental social drinking behavior and high school students’ attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. The cross-sectional design collected data from participants at a single point in time, while the mixed-methods approach combined quantitative survey responses with qualitative short-answer responses to better understand participants’ perceptions.

Participants and Eligibility Criteria

Anonymous, self-reported data collected from surveys administered to two separate groups were utilized: high school students and parents of high school students in the United States. Participants included high school students in grades 9-12 and parents of high school students living in the United States. Participants were eligible to participate if they met one of the following criteria: 1) they were currently enrolled in grades 9-12 at a high school in the United States, or 2) they were a parent or legal guardian of a current high school student in the United States. A total of 226 survey responses were received. Of these responses, 143 were from high school

students, 74 from parents of high school students, and 9 respondents selected “None” when identifying their participant category. Since the respondents who selected “None” did not meet the study’s inclusion criteria, they were excluded from the final analyses. Therefore, the final analytical sample consisted of 217 participants, including 143 high school students and 74 parents.

Survey Development

Two separate surveys were developed by the researcher using Google Forms: one for high school students and one for parents of high school students. Survey questions were developed after reviewing existing literature regarding parental influence, parental modeling, alcohol attitudes, and underage drinking. The survey questions were reviewed by the researcher’s AP Research teacher before distribution to evaluate the clarity, organization, and appropriateness of the questions. Feedback from this review was incorporated before the surveys were distributed to participants. The questions were designed to examine participants’ experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding parental social drinking while also collecting demographic information. Both surveys included a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale questions, and short-answer questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Students and parents completed separate surveys created for this study, which allowed for their responses to be collected independently. Regarding the two surveys, the questions were structured to collect both numerical data and short written explanations. The student survey collected demographic information, including grade level, gender, and household type. Students were also asked about the frequency with which they observed their parents consume alcohol, how often they observed parental drinking in social settings, whether their parents permitted them to drink alcohol at home, their attitudes toward alcohol and underage drinking, and their perceptions of how observing parental social drinking influenced their views on underage alcohol consumption. Most questions were multiple-choice and used Likert-scale responses to measure frequency and students’ levels of agreement, while short-response questions allowed students to explain their level of agreement. This combination of data enhanced the qualitative component of the study by collecting personal explanations that could not be captured through quantitative data alone. The parent survey collected demographic information, including gender and the number and grade level of their high school children. Parents were asked about

the frequency and setting of their alcohol consumption, how often they consumed alcohol in front of their children, whether they allowed their children to drink alcohol at home and under what circumstances, and their perceptions of how their social drinking behaviors influenced their high school children’s attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. The full student and parent survey instruments are provided as supplementary material.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Before beginning the survey, participants were informed that all responses would remain anonymous. A convenience sampling method was used, as participants were recruited voluntarily rather than by random selection. These surveys were distributed to students and high school parents known to the researcher and were also publicized on social media to reach high school students and parents across the United States. Additionally, QR codes linked to the survey were created and displayed on the researcher’s vehicle in an effort to gain responses from a broader and more diverse population. Data collection occurred over a period of 31 days. Because convenience sampling was utilized rather than random sampling, the findings should not be interpreted as representative of all high school students or parents of high school students in the United States.

Definition of Parental Social Drinking

For the purposes of this study, parental social drinking was defined as the consumption of alcoholic beverages in social settings, such as family gatherings, holidays, celebrations, dinners, sporting events, parties, and similar social occasions. Religious alcohol consumption was intentionally excluded from this definition to maintain the study’s focus on social drinking behaviors.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages generated from Google Forms and verified by the researcher. In addition to descriptive statistics, a chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the frequency with which students observed parental social drinking was associated with their attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used to determine statistical significance. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Open-ended responses were read multiple times to identify recurring themes and

patterns. Responses with similar reasoning were grouped into broader themes, including accepting, neutral, and unaccepting attitudes toward underage drinking and perceptions of parental influence. Then, quotations were selected to represent each theme while maintaining participant anonymity. All qualitative coding was performed by the researcher. Because this study was completed as an independent high school research project, a formal intercoder reliability assessment was not conducted. This represents a limitation of the qualitative analysis and should be considered when interpreting the findings. Although parent and student surveys were not matched between individual parents and their high school children, the analysis could not determine whether an individual parent's drinking behavior was associated with their own child's attitudes. Therefore, the inferential analysis examined associations across the overall student sample rather than within individual parent-child pairs.

Ethical Considerations

The current study was performed as an individual AP Research study using anonymous survey data gathered from high school students and parents of high school students. Before the start of the survey, all participants received an introductory statement that explained the aims of the study and clarified that participation in the research was completely voluntary. In addition, participants were informed about the anonymity of their responses and that the information obtained during the survey would be used anonymously in the research paper. Participants provided their consent by electronically selecting "I agree." For student participants, selecting "I agree" served as student assent. Separate parental permission was not obtained for minor participants. No personal data was collected, and all responses were saved anonymously using Google Forms. These procedures protected participant confidentiality because responses could not be connected to individual participants. Since the study used anonymous surveys, posed minimal risks, and did not involve any personal identifying information, IRB approval was not obtained for this study. The research procedures and survey materials were reviewed by the researcher's AP Research teacher before data collection began.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A total of 226 participants completed the survey. Of these respondents, 143 were high school students (63.3%), 74 were parents of high school students (32.7%),

and 9 respondents selected "None" when identifying their participant category. Since the respondents who selected "None" did not meet the study's inclusion criteria, they were excluded from the final analyses. Data from students and parents were analyzed separately to identify patterns within each group rather than direct parent-child relationships (Figure 1).

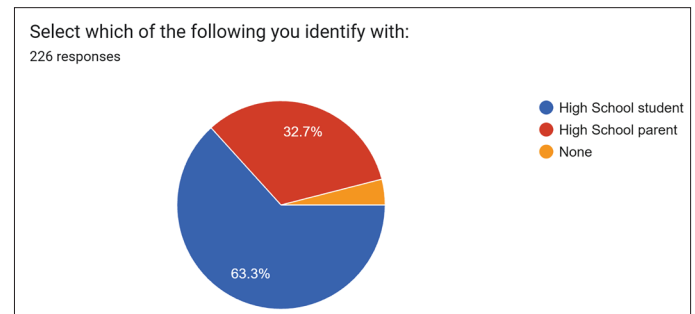


Figure 1. Participant classification of survey respondents. Distribution of all 226 survey responses by participant category.

Student Results

Among student respondents, 95 were 11th graders (66.4%), 21 were 12th graders (14.7%), 15 were 10th graders (10.5%), and 12 were 9th graders (8.4%). Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 79 students (55.2%) identifying as female and 64 students (44.8%) identifying as male. A majority of students (82.5%) reported living in a two-parent household, while the remaining students reported living in a single-parent or divorced household (Figure 2).

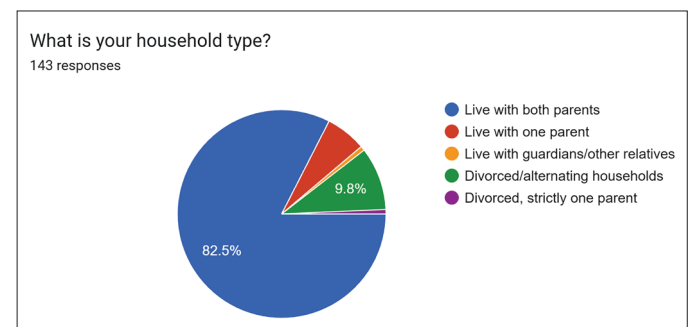


Figure 2. Demographic characteristics of the student sample. Distribution of student participants by grade level, gender, and household type.

Most students reported observing parental alcohol use. Specifically, 48 students reported seeing their parents consume alcohol often (once a week or more), while 44 students reported seeing their parents drink sometimes (1-3 times a month). Additionally, 33 students reported observing their parents drink alcohol rarely (less than once a month), while 15 students reported never seeing their parents drink. This suggests that parental alcohol consumption is commonly observed among the high school students in this study. To determine whether students had ever observed their parents drinking in social settings, they were asked how frequently they saw them in these environments. The data showed that 23 students observed their parents drinking in social contexts often (once a week or more), 60 reported sometimes (1-3 times a month), 42 reported rarely (less than once a month), and 18 reported never. Altogether, 58.1% of students reported seeing their parents consume alcohol in social settings at least sometimes, indicating that observing parental alcohol consumption was prevalent in social environments (Figure 3).

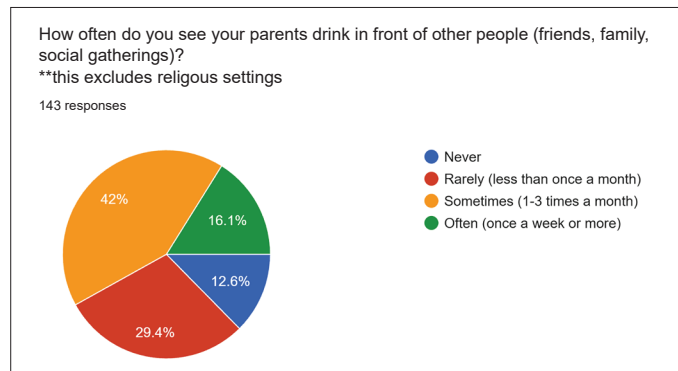


Figure 3. Student-reported parental alcohol consumption. Frequency with which students reported observing their parents consume alcohol in general and in social settings.

To better understand the settings in which students observed these behaviors, they were asked to provide a few examples of these environments. One participant explained, "During holidays (i.e., Christmas, New Year's, July 4th, etc.), my parents tend to drink." Another stated, "At dinner every night." A third student reported, "Family gatherings or sports watching events." One participant wrote, "When my mom gets home from work, she'll often pour a glass of wine. My dad usually cracks a can of beer." Another explained, "Majority events are celebratory, including things like birthdays,

anniversaries, etc. However, even at regular gatherings like a simple dinner, alcohol is always ordered." Despite frequent exposure, most students reported that their parents were rarely or never intoxicated in their presence. 74 students reported never seeing their parents tipsy or drunk, and 47 students reported rarely (less than once a month). However, 17 students reported seeing their parents intoxicated sometimes (1-3 times a month), while only 5 students reported seeing this behavior often (once a week or more) (Figure 4). Ultimately, this suggests that parental drinking was generally perceived as moderate among students.

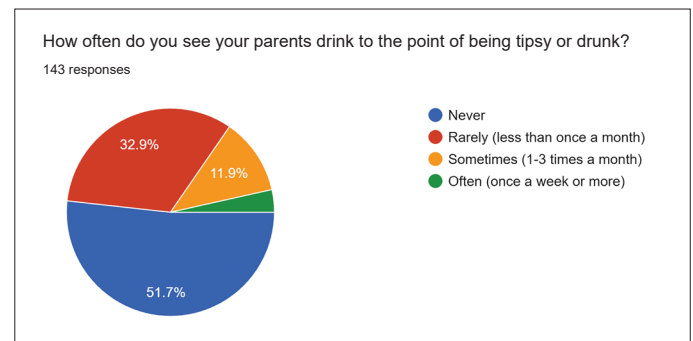


Figure 4. Student-reported parental intoxication. Frequency with which students reported observing their parents become tipsy or intoxicated.

Consequently, students' attitudes toward alcohol were then examined in relation to their reported exposure. 50 students (35%) described alcohol as acceptable, 80 students (55.9%) as neutral, and 13 students (9.1%) as unacceptable. When students were specifically asked how observing their parents drink in social contexts affected their views of underage drinking, 97 students reported neutral feelings, 25 students reported acceptance, and 21 students reported unacceptable attitudes (Figure 5). Although these descriptive statistics summarize students' responses, they do not determine whether observing parental social drinking is associated with students' attitudes toward underage drinking. Therefore, an inferential statistical analysis was conducted to further examine this relationship. The results of this analysis are presented in the Inferential Analysis section below.

Inferential Analysis

Further analysis of the association between parental exposure to social drinking and students' attitudes toward underage drinking involved conducting a chi-

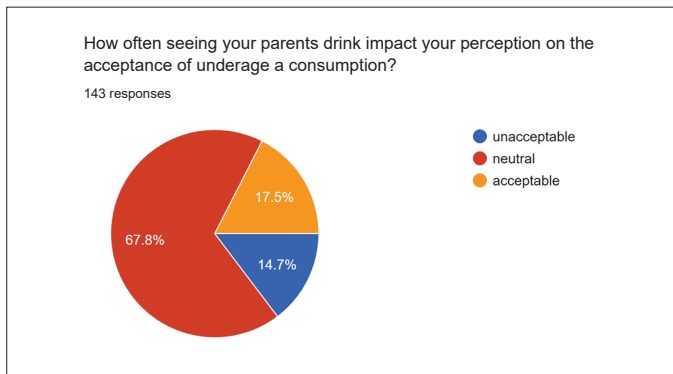


Figure 5. Students' attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. Distribution of students' attitudes toward underage drinking and the perceived influence of parental social drinking.

square test of independence. The study sought to find out if there was any association between how frequently students observed their parents drink on social occasions and the students' attitudes regarding underage drinking. Statistical significance was found between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 26.29$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$), such that the frequency with which students observe their parents drink on social occasions was significantly associated with students' attitudes toward underage drinking. The statistical finding implies that parental social drinking exposure is associated with students' attitudes toward underage drinking. The study analyzed parent responses and students' responses independently rather than matching the parent responses with those of students within each family.

To understand why students chose their attitude category toward underage drinking, they were asked to explain their choice. One participant stated, "I think seeing them drink doesn't make me more inclined to drink or less inclined to drink. I feel neutral towards it." Another explained, "It doesn't affect me because they are of drinking age. I also don't think it's such a big deal if you drink a little underage as long as it's responsibly, with caution." Similarly, one student wrote, "I don't think seeing my parents drink influences whether or not I will drink underage. I have seen them drink before, and have not done so myself, so I do not believe these things to be related." The majority of these students explained their stance as neutral because they believed that seeing their parents drink had little to no influence on their own attitudes toward underage drinking. Students who expressed accepting attitudes frequently described their parents as role models. One participant

stated, "It definitely normalizes drinking for me. If my parents let me drink in certain circumstances, it creates an environment where alcohol is not an evil thing, but something that can be enjoyed with precaution, taste, and limits." Another explained, "I look up to my parents, and if they do it, I don't feel more inclined to do it, but it feels like they won't be as mad or will understand better, I guess." A third participant commented, "If my parents are able to do it for special events in a controlled environment, with their permission, I should be able to as well." These responses indicate that for these students, their parents serve as role models. Seeing their parents drink may give them the impression that underage drinking is acceptable if done responsibly. Students who expressed unacceptable attitudes often emphasized the risks associated with underage alcohol consumption. One participant wrote, "Brains aren't fully developed, so no one under 21 should be drinking. My parents' behavior while drinking has only made me less inclined to drink." Another explained, "I witness my parents drinking all the time and even some friends of my age, but I still know that underage drinking can be dangerous, so I limit it to only when I have parental approval." A third participant stated, "My perception of underage alcohol consumption is influenced by seeing how my parents drink. Since they drink very rarely and are not tipsy or drunk often, it shows me that alcohol is not something to take lightly." These responses suggest that some students associated parental behaviors with greater awareness of the dangers associated with alcohol and stronger disapproval of underage drinking.

Parent Results

Among the 74 parent respondents, 64 were female (86.5%), and 10 were male (13.5%). Additionally, the majority of parents reported living with at least one high school student. When parents were asked about their levels of drinking in front of their children, responses varied: 9 parents reported drinking often (once a week or more) in front of their children, 16 parents reported sometimes (1-3 times a month), 32 reported rarely (less than once a month), and 17 reported never drinking around their high school children (Figure 6).

Parents' relatively low drinking habits in front of their children were reflected in their low intoxication levels. 54 parents reported never becoming tipsy or drunk in front of their children, 19 reported doing so rarely (less than once a month), and 1 reported sometimes (1-3 times a month) (Figure 7).

To determine whether there was a similarity between

where children reported seeing their parents drink and where parents reported socially drinking, parents were asked the same question regarding the environments in which they usually consume alcohol (Figure 8).

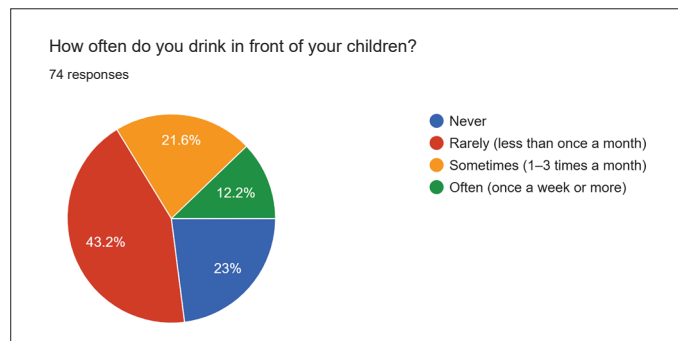


Figure 6. Parent-reported alcohol consumption in the presence of their children. Frequency with which parents reported drinking alcohol around their high school children.

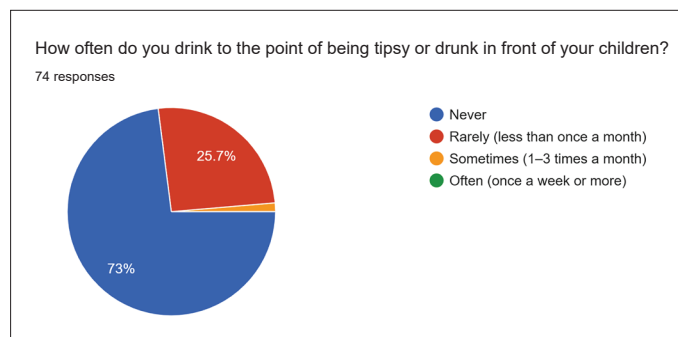


Figure 7. Parent-reported intoxication in the presence of their children. Frequency with which parents reported becoming tipsy or intoxicated around their high school children.

The responses were consistent with the students' answers, as shown in Figure 3, where both groups identified similar environments in which parents socially consume alcohol. Regarding parents' beliefs about how their social drinking behaviors influence their high school children's attitudes toward underage drinking, responses varied: 45 parents reported feeling that their habits completely influence their children's attitudes toward alcohol, 18 expressed neutral feelings, and 11 believed that their drinking habits do not influence their high school children's perceptions of underage alcohol use (Figure 9).

Parents who believed their drinking habits did not influence their children often explained that their children made independent decisions and had been educated about alcohol. One parent stated, "My kid knows what they should and should not be doing and

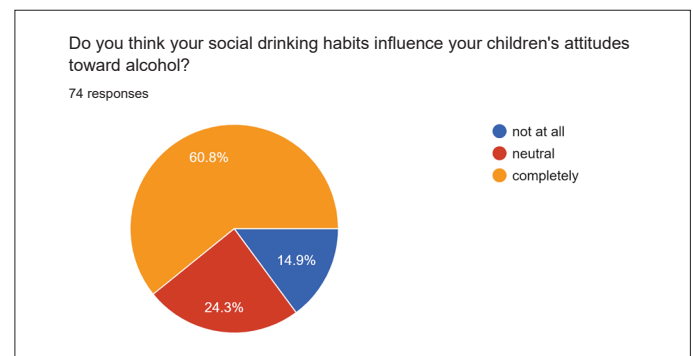


Figure 9. Parents' perceptions of their influence on children's attitudes toward alcohol. Distribution of parents' perceptions regarding how their social drinking behaviors influenced their children's attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption.

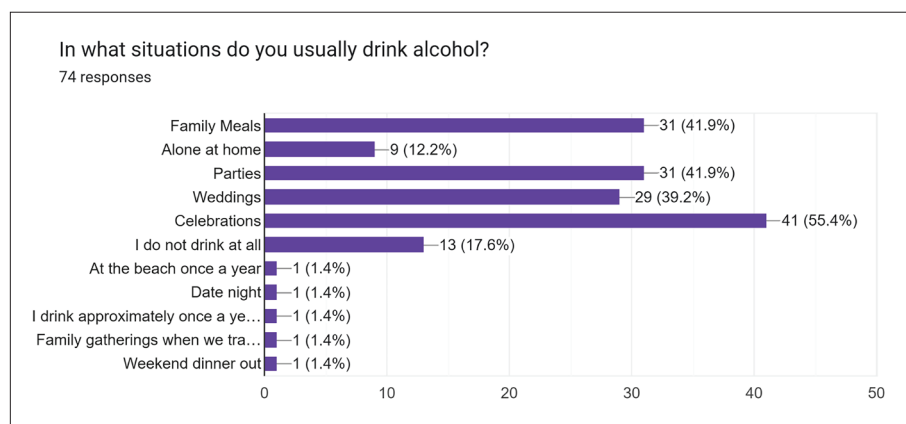


Figure 8. Parent-reported social drinking environments. Social settings in which parents reported consuming alcohol.

how alcohol affects their growth. She chooses not to drink.” Another explained, “We are open with our son about alcohol, its side effects, and making good choices, as well as what the law states.” A third simply commented, “They don’t care.” These responses suggest that these parents believe their social drinking habits have no influence because they educate their children about the dangers of alcohol and note that their children make independent choices. Parents who reported neutral influence often believed that parental behavior was only one of many factors affecting adolescents’ attitudes toward alcohol. One participant stated, “It is my hope that my child sees moderation is key and that drinking to the point of losing control is not necessary.” Another explained, “Teens drink in [high school] 95% because of peers.” A third wrote, “Perhaps there’s a correlation, but I do think genetics has more influence.” Parents who reported neutral influence often associated their children’s perceptions toward alcohol with external factors such as peer pressure or genetics rather than parental behavior. Parents who believed their behavior completely influenced their children frequently described themselves as role models. One participant explained, “My children look to me for guidance and to be a positive role model. Anything I do, they are a part of.” Another stated, “I believe that a parent’s obligation is to serve as a positive role model for their children, especially when considering the numerous negative effects of alcohol consumption.” A third commented, “If I don’t drink, then I would hope that it models for her not to drink. What children see, they learn and often repeat unconsciously.” These parents believed that their alcohol habits had a strong impact on their children’s attitudes toward alcohol because they believed they served as role models for their children to look up to. They believed that their behaviors played an important role in shaping what their children viewed as acceptable or unacceptable. However, these parental responses contrast with student data, which showed different associations between alcohol exposure and attitudes. (See Figures 5 and 9). A clear discrepancy was observed in perceptions of influence: The majority of students (67.8%) believed that their parents’ social drinking habits had a neutral influence on their views of underage drinking, while the majority of parents (60.8%) believed their habits completely influenced their high school children’s attitudes toward alcohol consumption. This contrast highlights a potential disconnect in how influence is understood within families.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental alcohol consumption in social settings and high school students’ attitudes toward underage drinking. The results indicate that while most students observe their parents drinking alcohol in social settings, they regard this drinking as controlled. Consequently, the majority of high school students portrayed neutral stances regarding their perception of alcohol and underage drinking. In contrast, parents strongly believed that their social drinking habits greatly influenced their high school children’s perceptions and attitudes toward alcohol and underage drinking. This discussion will analyze the perspectives of students and parents to better understand the discrepancy in how influence is perceived by each group.

From the students’ point of view, their parents’ drinking behavior in social contexts appeared to be normalized, but not perceived as personally influential. Although the majority of students witnessed their parents drinking in social environments such as holidays, family gatherings, and dinners, most students also indicated rarely or never seeing their parents intoxicated. This pattern displays a reason that may explain why most students expressed neutral feelings toward underage drinking. Students often distinguish between adult behavior and their own decision-making, viewing alcohol use as acceptable for adults due to the legal drinking age rather than as a catalyst for underage use. However, inferential statistical analysis suggested that greater exposure to parental social drinking was associated with more accepting attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. Therefore, although many students consciously reported little or no influence, the statistical findings suggest that parental social drinking may be associated with adolescents’ attitudes in more subtle ways than they recognize. Overall, these findings partially support the study’s hypothesis that students who more frequently observe their parents drinking in social settings would be more likely to perceive underage alcohol consumption as acceptable.

These findings partially align with previous research regarding parental influence on adolescent alcohol attitudes. Similar to the findings of Bohm and Esser (3), students who reported greater exposure to parental social drinking were more likely to express accepting attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption. Likewise, the results support McLeod’s discussion of Social Learning Theory (4), which suggests that adolescents learn

behaviors by observing important role models such as their parents. However, unlike several previous studies that reported stronger relationships between parental drinking and adolescent alcohol use, the majority of students in the present study still reported neutral attitudes toward underage drinking despite regularly observing parental social drinking. One possible explanation for this difference is that most students in the present study reported observing moderate and controlled alcohol consumption rather than frequent intoxication. Many students described seeing their parents drink primarily during holidays, family gatherings, dinners, and other social occasions while rarely observing them become intoxicated. As a result, students may have viewed alcohol as acceptable for responsible adult use without interpreting these behaviors as encouragement to engage in underage drinking themselves. This may explain why many participants reported neutral attitudes despite the statistically significant association identified in the inferential analysis. Although the surveys did not pair individual parents with their own children, the aggregate analysis suggests that greater reported exposure to parental social drinking was associated with more accepting student attitudes toward underage alcohol consumption.

Conversely, the parents of high school students viewed the extent of influence differently. The parents' responses also support previous research emphasizing the importance of parental communication and modeling. Similar to the findings reported by Cox *et al.* (5) and Yang *et al.* (7), many parents believed that their own behaviors served as important examples for their children. Parents frequently described themselves as role models and emphasized their responsibility to demonstrate appropriate alcohol-related behaviors, reflecting existing research suggesting that parental behavior and communication may be associated with adolescents' perceptions of alcohol use. Most parents believed that their alcohol consumption in social environments completely influenced their children's views on underage drinking. This belief may reflect parents' longer life experience and greater understanding of the long-term effects of alcohol use. Parents may believe that their awareness of the risks associated with alcohol increases the importance of the behaviors they model for their children. As role models, parents may feel a strong sense of responsibility to teach their children what they perceive as acceptable behavior. Ultimately, the contrast between student and parent responses suggests that age and experience play a major

role in how influence is perceived. The present findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that parents recognize their own behaviors as important influences on their children's attitudes toward alcohol. However, students may perceive this influence differently and instead focus on factors such as peer behavior and personal choice. Overall, this difference in perspective offers explanations as to why students primarily reported neutral influence while parents believed their influence was powerful and complete.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. To begin, the data were collected through self-reported surveys, which could have resulted in response bias. Because participants were asked about alcohol use and their attitudes, responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Students and parents may have adjusted their responses to appear more responsible or socially acceptable, which could reduce the accuracy of the findings by providing misleading information. This limitation may be important because most students reported neutral attitudes toward underage drinking. Even though the survey was anonymous, some students may have felt uncomfortable reporting more accepting attitudes toward underage drinking because they knew it was illegal for people under 21. As a result, some responses may have appeared more neutral than participants' true opinions. Additionally, student and parent responses were analyzed separately rather than matched within specific families. The study was unable to directly measure how an individual parent's social drinking habits influenced their own child's attitudes toward underage alcohol use. Instead, the results compared overall trends and patterns between the two groups and should be interpreted as group-level associations rather than direct evidence of parental influence.

Another limitation involved this study's sampling method. This study used convenience sampling, which increased accessibility and allowed for a greater number of participants. However, this method may have introduced sample bias and may limit the generalizability of the findings to all high school students and parents in the United States. Although participants were recruited from multiple social media platforms and various locations across the United States in an effort to reduce bias, the sample may still not fully represent the broader population. Additionally, participants' geographic

locations were not collected. As a result, it was not possible to determine how well the sample represented different regions of the United States. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the participants included in this study rather than all high school students and parents across the United States.

Lastly, the majority of students reported living in two-parent households. This may hinder how well the results reflect families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, household structures, or demographics. Additionally, the student sample was heavily composed of 11th-grade students, which may limit how well the findings reflect the attitudes of students in other high school grade levels. Furthermore, the parent sample was predominantly female, meaning fathers' perspectives were comparatively underrepresented. The number of student respondents (143) was also considerably larger than the number of parent respondents (74). This imbalance should be considered when comparing trends between the two groups.

IMPLICATIONS

Despite these limitations, the findings provide meaningful insight into the relationship between parental social drinking and high school students' attitudes toward alcohol. One important implication is the clear disconnect between parents' and high school students' perceptions of influence. While most parents believed their drinking habits completely influenced their children's attitudes, most students reported feeling a neutral influence. This suggests a potential difference between how parents and high school students perceive the impact of parental modeling. Other factors play a role in children's tendency to overlook the positive example their parents hope to set for them. The results suggest that high school students may separate adult behavior from their own decision-making more than parents assume. This reveals the importance of open communication about alcohol use within families, rather than relying solely on modeled behavior. Conversations about expectations, responsibility, and consequences may serve a greater role in shaping high school students' attitudes toward alcohol consumption than observation alone. Additionally, the findings suggest that prevention efforts related to underage drinking should consider both the perspectives of parents and high school students. Parents benefit from understanding that influence is not always interpreted the way they intend, while high school students may benefit from discussions about alcohol use and its long-term

effects. Ultimately, these findings may benefit parents, educators, and public health organizations in developing safer and more effective strategies to mitigate underage drinking among adolescents.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research could build on these findings by directly surveying students and parents within the same family. This would enable researchers to better assess how certain actions of parents are associated with their own child's attitudes toward alcohol rather than comparing overall group patterns. If this study were replicated, the next step would be to implement a matched parent-child design to strengthen the assessment of associations between parental behaviors and their own children's attitudes. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insight by tracking how students' perceptions of underage drinking change as they progress through adolescence. Future studies could also examine the impact of peer influence in addition to parental modeling. Because adolescence is a developmental period during which peer relationships become increasingly important, discovering how peer environments interact with parental behavior may help uncover a more comprehensive understanding of what influences students' attitudes toward underage drinking. Apart from the impact of peer influence, researchers may want to consider expanding the diversity of participants to better represent a wider range of cultural, socioeconomic, and family backgrounds. Understanding how these different dynamics affect perceptions of alcohol could strengthen the generalizability of findings and offer a better analysis of high school student decision-making habits.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between parental social drinking habits and high school students' perceptions of underage drinking. The results suggest that although many students are often exposed to their parents' consumption of alcohol in social settings, most students portray this influence as being neutral. In contrast, most parents believed that their social consumption of alcohol strongly influenced their children's perceptions of alcohol. This difference reflects the gap in how influence is understood within families. Ultimately, the results suggest that parental exposure alone does not directly translate into students' acceptance of alcohol use. Many students

distinguish their parents' legal drinking abilities from their own choices, while parents believe their actions completely influence their children. This contrast suggests that influence during adolescence is not as simple or direct as parents may believe.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The current study was performed as an individual AP Research study using anonymous survey data gathered from high school students and parents of high school students. Before the survey began, all participants received an introduction explaining the purpose of the research and clarifying that participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed that their responses would be anonymous and used anonymously in the course of writing the research paper. Participants provided electronic consent by choosing "I agree." For student participants, selecting "I agree" served as student assent. Separate parental permission was not obtained for minor participants. No personal data was collected, and all responses were saved anonymously using Google Forms. These procedures protected participant confidentiality because responses could not be connected to individual participants. Since the study relied on anonymous surveys, posed minimal risks to participants, and did not gather any identifiable information, IRB approval was not obtained. The researcher's AP Research teacher reviewed the research procedures and survey materials before data collection began.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Survey Instruments

Examining the Relationship Between Parental Social Drinking and High School Students' Attitudes Toward Underage Drinking

Survey Introduction and Consent

AP Research Survey - Alcohol Consumption

This is a project for my AP Research class about alcohol consumption. All answers are ANONYMOUS.

By checking "I agree," you agree to having your response anonymously used in the research paper.

Consent response: "I agree"

Participant Classification

Select which of the following you identify with:

Response options: High School student; High School parent; none

Student Survey Instrument

1. What grade are you in?

Response options: 9th; 10th; 11th; 12th

2. What is your gender?

Response options: Male; Female

3. What is your household type?

Response options: Live with both parents; Live with one parent; Live with guardians/other relatives; Divorced parents/alternating households; other

4. How often do you see your parents drink alcohol?

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more); other

5. How often do you see your parents drink in front of other people (friends, family, social gatherings)? **This excludes religious settings.

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more)

6. Please provide a few examples of these events.

Response format: Short answer

7. How often do you see your parents drink to the point of being tipsy or drunk?

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more)

8. Have your parents ever allowed you to drink alcohol at home with them?

Response options: yes; no

9. If yes, does it make you more inclined to consume alcohol without their supervision?

Response options: yes; no

10. In your own opinion, drinking alcohol is:

Response options: unacceptable; neutral; acceptable

11. How does seeing your parents drink impact your perception of the acceptance of underage alcohol consumption?

Response options: unacceptable; neutral; acceptable
Participants were then asked: Please explain your answer.

Parent Survey Instrument

1. Gender

Response options: Male; Female

2. How many high school children do you live with?

Response options: 1; 2; 3; 4; 5+

3. Grade of children: (select multiple boxes for different children if needed)

Response options: 9th; 10th; 11th; 12th

4. How often do you drink alcohol?

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more)

5. How often do you drink in front of your children?

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more)

6. How often do you drink to the point of being tipsy or drunk in front of your children?

Response options: Never; Rarely (less than once a month); Sometimes (1-3 times a month); Often (once a week or more)

7. In what situations do you usually drink alcohol? (multiple select)

Response options: family meals; alone at home; parties; weddings; celebrations; I do not drink at all; other

8. Do you allow your children to drink at home?

Response options: yes; no

9. If yes, under what circumstances? (multiple select)

Response options: parties; holidays; under adult supervision only; celebrations; other

10. Do you think your social drinking habits influence your children's attitudes toward alcohol?

Response options: Not at all; Neutral; Completely
Participants were then asked: Please explain your answer.