

Research Brief

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To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- ◆ conduct research on factors that influence development;
- ◆ develop and test the effectiveness of interventions;
- ◆ study service systems and work to improve them;
- ◆ advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems; and
- ◆ disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research.

Family Management Matters: Adolescent Risk Taking and the Development of Adult Alcohol Use Disorders

Original research presented in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*

Adult alcohol use disorders remain one of the most prevalent and costly mental health concerns, and understanding their development is of pressing importance. Research has consistently shown that youth who are impulsive or have difficulty controlling socially undesirable behavior are at increased risk for alcohol abuse and dependence over the lifespan. These youth are often thought of as impulsive risk takers. Youth high in internalizing symptoms, like anxiety, stress, and depression, may also be at greater risk for alcohol use disorders in adulthood, but research findings have been inconsistent.

Although family environmental factors have been shown to affect alcohol initiation and regular use, less is known about how they might protect youth from later alcohol abuse and dependence. The role of family management practices — like parental monitoring, rules, and norms guiding youth social activities — in breaking the relationship

between youth risk and adult alcohol use disorders is the subject of this research brief.

We used a community-based longitudinal sample of 808 ethnically diverse urban youth from the Seattle Social Development Project to assess whether good family management during adolescence moderated the effects of youth risk on the development of alcohol abuse and dependence at age 27.

Family management practices in early adolescence (ages 11 - 14) were identified from youth reports of three aspects of parenting behavior:

- Parental monitoring (e.g., When you are away from home, do your parents know where you are and whom you are with?)
- Rules (e.g., The rules in my family are clear.)
- Norms guiding youth social activities (e.g., When you misbehave, do your

Key Findings

Youth described as either impulsive risk takers or high in anxiety and stress are thought to be at heightened risk for alcohol use disorders in adulthood. We found that:

- Good family management, expressed in adequate parental monitoring, rules, and norms guiding social behavior reduced the risks of adolescent impulsive risk taking:
 - ⇒ Youth risk takers were more likely to have an alcohol use disorder at age 27 only if they were in consistently poorly managed families.
 - ⇒ In consistently well-managed families, youth risk takers were at no increased risk of alcohol use disorders at age 27.
- Youth high in anxiety and stress were not at increased risk of alcohol use disorders at age 27.

Findings have practical implications. Interventions aimed at strengthening family management in early adolescence may have important preventive effects, especially for youth who are prone to impulsive, risk-taking behavior.

parents take time to calmly discuss what you have done wrong?)

Youth risk at age 14-15 was measured in terms of disinhibiting and inhibiting behavior. Disinhibiting, or undercontrolled and impulsive risk-taking behaviors, included things like doing something dangerous on a dare, doing crazy things even if they are a little dangerous, and enjoying going to a wild, out-of-control party. Inhibiting or anxious behaviors included things like worrying a lot, feeling overly anxious to please others, and being afraid of making mistakes.

Results

Inhibiting behavior in adolescence did not predict alcohol abuse and dependence at age 27 in this study, even when family management was poor.

A very different picture emerged when we examined youth disinhibiting behavior. Impulsive risk taking significantly predicted adult alcohol abuse and dependence at age 27. However, good family management was found to protect against this risk. As Figure 1 shows, behavioral disinhibition in adolescence was unrelated to adult alcohol abuse and dependence in consistently well-

managed families. Impulsivity was predictive of adult alcohol abuse and dependence only when family management practices were consistently poor.

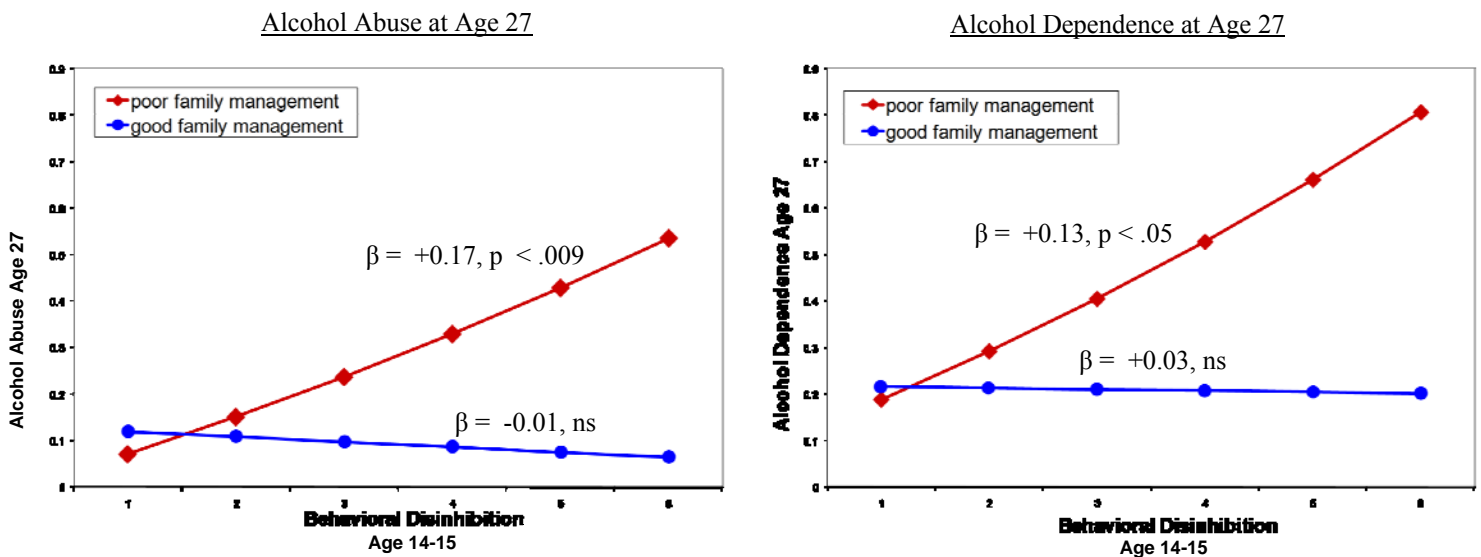
Summary and Implications

This study found no evidence that youth high in inhibiting behaviors like anxiety, worry, and self-consciousness were at increased risk of adult alcohol use disorders.

However, youth who were impulsive or undercontrolled were at greater risk for adult alcohol use disorders, including both abuse and dependence, only when raised in poorly managed family environments. Good family management — expressed in consistent parental monitoring, rules, and norms guiding social behavior — protected youth high in impulsive, risk-taking behavior from alcohol abuse and dependence later in adulthood.

These findings have practical implications. Interventions aimed at strengthening family management in early adolescence may have important preventive effects with respect to the development of alcohol use disorders over the lifespan, particularly for youth who are prone to impulsive, risk-taking behavior.

Figure 1. Family management matters: The relationship between behavioral disinhibition (impulsive risk taking) and family management in adolescence and alcohol abuse and dependence in adulthood.



For additional information on this topic, refer to the original article:

Hill, Karl G., Hawkins, J. David, Bailey, Jennifer A., Catalano, Richard F., Abbott, Robert D., and Shapiro, Valerie B. (2010). Person-environment interaction in the prediction of alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence in adulthood. [Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 110, 62-69.](#)