Understanding the relationship between adolescent alcohol use and aggression: Developmental or contemporaneous?

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Methods cont.

The second stage applied an Auto-regressive Latent Growth Model with Structured Residuals (ALT-SR) model.

The model accounts for the individual variability in alcohol and aggression at each time point to determine whether high levels of alcohol use on the individual level account for corresponding spikes in aggression, over and above what would be expected based on that person’s normal trajectory of aggression.

Results

• The rate of change in alcohol use over time was statistically significant however on average the sample did not change in their aggression levels over time.

• Young people in this study significantly increased their alcohol use from age 13 to 16.

• Alcohol use at age 13, 14 and 16 was associated with corresponding increases in aggressive behaviour over and above what would be expected based on the normal trajectories of the young people.

• However, increasing alcohol use at each time point was not prospectively related to increasing aggression at the following time point.

Conclusions

• This study found that the development of alcohol use and aggression are positively correlated in adolescence.

• Increases in alcohol use predicted corresponding spikes in aggression at three of the four time points and the effect was strongest at age 16.

• However, increases in alcohol use did not predict higher than normal aggression at the following time point, suggesting alcohol use has a proximal, rather than lagged influence on aggression in adolescence.

Implications

• A contemporaneous relationship between alcohol and aggression as demonstrated here is consistent with the Snares hypothesis (Moffitt 1993) where heavy substance use can effectively ensnare young people into antisocial pathways by creating short-term increases in antisocial behaviour during a period when most young people would show desistance in antisocial behaviour (Hussong et al., 2004).

• Programs that are effective in preventing, delaying and reducing heavy alcohol use or binge drinking in adolescence also have the potential to significantly reduce violence and delinquency among young people, as demonstrated in some classroom prevention program evaluations (Botvin et al., 2006; Vogl & Teesson, 2006).

References


• Newton N., Teesson M, Barrett EL, Slade T, Connolly PJ (2012). The CAP study, development of alcohol use is a cluster randomized controlled trial. BMC Psychology. 1(2), 118.


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