TRAIYCTORIES OF ADOLESCENT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: A PROSPECTIVE COHORT STUDY

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Introduction and Aims: Adolescents often display different trajectories of alcohol involvement. Transition through stages of consumption may be an important predictor of later harms, including alcohol use disorder (AUD). Previous attempts to conceptualise these trajectories lacked granularity in measuring levels of alcohol involvement. This study aimed to model dynamic changes in alcohol consumption via repeated assessment throughout adolescence.

Design and Methods: Using latent class analysis, data from the Australian Parental Supply of Alcohol Longitudinal Study (APSALS; n=1813) were used to model trajectories of alcohol involvement (typical quantity and frequency) over five waves of annual follow-up (Grade 8 to Grade 11). Baseline sociodemographic data in Grade 7 were used to create profiles of trajectory membership. Regression models were used to determine whether consumption trajectories predicted AUD symptoms in Grade 12 after controlling for known covariates.

Results: A four-class solution was identified: late-onset moderate drinkers (n = 503); early-onset moderate drinkers (n = 663); abstainers (n = 352); and early-onset heavy drinkers (n = 295). With late onset moderate drinkers as the reference group, factors associated with reduced risk of becoming an early-onset heavy drinker were: stricter parental monitoring, more alcohol-specific household rules, and fewer substance-using peers. Early-onset heavy drinkers had increased odds of reporting symptoms of AUD in Grade 12.

Discussion and Conclusions: This study provides evidence that early initiation and rapid escalation of alcohol use is associated with increased risk of alcohol-related harm compared to late onset, moderate drinking. Notably, parenting factors such as alcohol-specific household rules are associated with reduced risk of early-onset heavy drinking.

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