

College students' perspectives on alcohol and cigarettes: A case study of perceived parental permission.

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Abstract

Previous studies are mostly about parents' and peers' viewpoints, and college students' perceptions are largely lacking. Furthermore, there are many studies about Perceived Parental Permission of alcohol use among college students; however, there are limited research about PPP of cigarettes. This study aims to investigate that based on college students' knowledge, how PPP of alcohol and cigarettes influences college students drinking and smoking habits. The research data is based on eight semi-structured interview about alcohol use and smoking cigarettes. Those interviewees are recruited from a prestigious university in Taipei, Taiwan. College students have high possibility to agree their parents' attitude toward alcohol or cigarettes simply based on their own thoughts. Over half of the interviewees agree their parents' attitude toward alcohol or cigarettes. College students do have a tendency to think their parents' attitude has influenced their drinking and smoking habits. High percentage of the interviewees think that their parents do affect their habits of using these two substances. Since college students are likely to agree their parents' attitude does influences their drinking and smoking habits, parents might be a crucial effect to college students' substance abuse.

Introduction

The transition to college life can be frustrating for young adults. The stress level could be much higher and life would become tougher than before. Young adults would need to face some issues that they have never encountered including moving far from home without the protection of parents, having difficulty solving new relationship problems and having a lot of homework and exams on their plate. As a result, some research shows that college students would rely on alcohol or cigarettes to alleviate their stress (e.g., Park et al., 2015). Nowadays, it is more and more common to see college students drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. Cigarette use among college students is exponentially on the rise, and its co-use with alcohol may contribute to negative outcomes in this population (Littlefield et al., 2015). Another research shows that multiple factors influence college drinking, from an individual's genetic susceptibility to the positive and negative effects of alcohol, alcohol use during high

school, campus norms related to drinking, expectations regarding the benefits and detrimental effects of drinking, penalties for underage drinking, parental attitudes about drinking while at college, whether one is member of a Greek organization or involved in athletics, and conditions within the larger community that determine how accessible and affordable alcohol is (White, A., & Hingson, R., 2013).

Among all the factors that could affect college drinking, some research puts an emphasis on parental viewpoints about drinking and smoking while at college; young adults' use of cigarettes and alcohol is influenced by parental and peer behavior and relationships (e.g., Asbridge et al., 2005; Avenevoli & Merikangas, 2003; Kristjansson et al., 2008; Kuendig & Kuntsche, 2006; Simons-Morton, 2004). College students who perceive their parents to hold permissive views about their alcohol use engage in heavier drinking (Calhoun et al., 2017). Research suggests that parents continue to influence late adolescent alcohol use during the college years (Turrisi et al., 2000; Wood et al., 2004). For example, parental modeling of alcohol use and communication about alcohol between parents and young adults. Perceived parental permissibility of alcohol use (PPP), that is, students' perceptions of whether and how much their parents think it is acceptable for them to drink, is associated with college students' drinking quantity, binge drinking likelihood, and negative alcohol consequences (Abar et al., 2009; Varvil-Weld et al., 2014; Walls et al., 2009). Studies of early to mid-adolescents have consistently linked PPP to earlier initiation of alcohol use and greater drinking (Hyatt & Collins, 2000; Tucker et al., 2008; van der Vorst et al., 2009). This suggests that PPP is a crucial determinant for the use of alcohol among college students.

College students' alcohol abuse is a problem on many campuses (Perkins & Wechsler, 1996). While some students arrive at college with firmly established drinking habits, others embark on their college life by using alcohol. However, previous studies (e.g., Asbridge et al., 2005) are mostly about parents' and peers' points of view, and college students' perceptions are largely lacking. Moreover, although there are many studies show that PPP has a lot to do with alcohol use among college students (Abar et al., 2009), there are limited research about PPP of electronic cigarettes and traditional cigarettes. Another research has shown that adults perceive that electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are effective for smoking cessation (Camenga et al., 2015). Hence, this study aims to investigate how PPP of alcohol and cigarettes influences college students' drinking and smoking habits.

Methodology

2.1 Research questions and design

This study aims to investigate these two questions: (1) How Perceived Parental

Permission of alcohol and cigarettes influences college students' drinking and smoking habits? (2) What are college students' attitude toward their parents' perspective on alcohol and cigarettes?

The study is designed as a qualitative study which provides participants with an opportunity to express their knowledge, views and experiences. Also, the semi-structured interview enables interviewees to respond in detail.

2.2 Research context

Those interviewees were recruited in one of the most prestigious universities in Taipei, Taiwan. The university is a major university, which has eleven colleges and fifty-four departments. This makes it one of the most comprehensive university in Taiwan. Undergraduate students from all over the country as well as overseas enrolled in the university, which makes student groups more diversified.

2.3 Participants

Because this study aims to investigate how Perceived Parental Permission of alcohol and cigarettes influences college students' drinking and smoking habits; as a result, there are three types of participants that are the main targets in the study: 1. Both drinking and smoking. 2. Drinking but not smoking. 3. Neither drinking nor smoking. Participants were randomly picked up from one university in Taiwan. First, they would be asked whether he or she was willing to be the interviewee of the study. Second, they would have to say whether they were in the habit of drinking or smoking. There are eight interviewees in the study: 3 people (both drinking and smoking), 3 people (drinking but not smoking), 2 people (neither drinking nor smoking). The reason why there was no interviewee who smokes cigarettes but does not drink alcohol is because it is pretty hard to find people with this habit on campus.

Table 1 Participants' profile

Pseudonym	age	drinking	smoking
Liu	20	Yes	No
Lin	20	Yes	Yes
Chou	22	Yes	Yes
Wu	20	Yes	Yes
Wang	20	Yes	No
Li	19	Yes	No

Chang	23	No	No
Huang	21	No	No

2.4 Data collection

The data was collected through audio-taped, semi-structured interviews, each lasting 5 to 10 minutes. Some interviews were done in English, while some are done in Chinese because of the request of the interviewees. All interviews were based on some questions about: the frequency they use the two substances, the perceptions of their parents on their using the two substances and their own perspectives on the two substances (see Appendix A for the interview schedule).

2.5 Data analysis

Before the data analysis begins, all of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Also, all interviewees were provided with pseudonyms that maintain their gender and ethnicity. Moreover, the data is analyzed through thematic analysis, in search of recurring themes. Some of the interviews were done in Mandarin and the excerpts presented in the findings were translated into English.

Four emergent themes were identified from the interviews: (1) Parental explicit permission on alcohol. (2) parental disapproval on cigarettes. (3) College students' positive attitude toward their parents' opinion. (4) Perceived parental permission's influence on college students' habits.

Findings

3.1 Parents tend to explicitly permit college students to use alcohol in college.

Because this research paper aims to study the perceived parental permission of alcohol and cigarettes, the first few interview questions will be asking about parents' attitude. First, the interviewees were asked: What is your parents' attitude about your using alcohol in college? For example, Liu said,

I. Other transcription conventions include: (1) stressed words in CAPITALS; (2) pauses one second or less indicated by ‘,’; (3) pauses more than one second by ‘.’; (4) a rising vocal pitch or intonation indicated by ‘?’; (5) transcription comments in brackets.

Excerpt 1. My parents explicitly said that they allow me to drink alcohol, but I cannot drink too much. Also, I cannot drink alcohol with boys alone.

Liu's parents explicitly permit her to drink alcohol in college, but she cannot drink with boys alone. The reason might be that they would worry about her personal safety. By the same token, Lin, Chou, Wu, Chang and Huang, they all answered that their parents explicitly say yes or even encourage them for their using alcohol in college. According to the answers of the interviewees, Parents tend to explicitly allow college students to use alcohol in college. However, Wang said,

Excerpt 2. Although my parents allowed me to drink alcohol, they said I could only drink it at home. They told me that I need to avoid drinking alcohol when I am out.

The reason why Wang said that his parents told him that he can only drink alcohol at home might probably be the same reason as Liu: because their parents would worry about their personal safety. Personal safety might be one of the most concerned part when parents talk about their children using alcohol in college. As a result, although some parents agree college students using alcohol in college, they might have some restrictions related to personal safety. As for Li, he said,

Excerpt 3. I don't know what was his parents' attitude because they never talk about issues about alcohol with me. But they know I will drink alcohol with my friends from time to time. So, I think they consent it tacitly.

This is a quite interesting answer because it might be rare for parents not discussing issues about alcohol with college students. Overall, from the answers of question one, they show that parents do have a tendency to agree college students using alcohol.

3.2 Most of the parents (or at least father or mother alone) show disapproval on college students using cigarettes.

Unlike the attitude toward alcohol, the answers of the interviewees for question 2 show that most of the parents explicitly say that they do not allow their college children to smoke in college. Compared to using alcohol, smoking cigarettes have much more influence on our health. This general pattern of public thought might be the parents reason to ban college students from smoking. Liu, Wang and Chang said that their parents ban them from smoking cigarettes is because using cigarettes has been

medically proved that it is bad for our health. Moreover, Chou said,

Excerpt 4. My dad will tell me not to smoke from time to time. He thinks that it is not only bad for my health but also cost me lots of money.

This suggests that the reasons why Chou's father asked him not to smoke cigarettes are because cigarettes are bad for his health condition and he would need to spend lots of money on it. And Wu said,

Excerpt 5. My mom once found a lighter in my pocket and she asked me not to smoke again because smoking cigarettes can do harm to my health and cost me lots of money.

In both of this case, both of Chou's and Wu's parents have the same reasons for banning them from smoking. As a result, parents' biggest concern on students' smoking cigarettes are the bad influence on health and the high price.

3.3 College students have high possibility to agree their parents' attitude toward alcohol or cigarettes simply based on their own thoughts.

By taking advantage of the interview data, we are able to find out that college students are likely to agree their parents' attitude toward alcohol and cigarettes. For instance, Liu said,

Excerpt 6. I agree my parents' attitude because I believe that drinking is a kind of entertainment but not necessary for human. So we can only drink in some occasions but not frequently.

This reveals that it is because the interviewee's own belief that makes her agree her parents' attitude. Along these lines, Wang said,

Excerpt 7. I agree. I myself do not like to smoke.

This shows that it is because of his own favor that makes him agree his parents. However, there are some different ideas from two of the interviewees. Lin (the one who doesn't know his parents' attitude toward cigarettes) said,

Excerpt 8. If my parents forbade me from smoking, I would understand why they did this; but, I would not agree with it. I think I have the freedom to

decide what to do.

Unlike the previous interviewees, Lin would not agree his parents' attitude if his parents banned him from smoking cigarettes. Obviously, it is because his own free will and because he thinks he is already an adult. Similarly, Chou said,

Excerpt 9. I am quite OK with their attitude. I mean I know why they will approve or oppose and I respect their attitude. But, I still think that I have the freedom to decide because I am now an adult.

From the viewpoints of these two interviewees, although they can understand or feel ok with their parents' attitude, they still think they have the freedom to choose what they want to do. It might be reasonable for college students to think in this way because college students are adults and adults should have their independent thought. Also, Chang said,

Excerpt 10. I do not listen to my parents to drink alcohol because I like to stay sober, but I do agree with them for not smoking.

This shows that although he agrees with his parents' attitude toward cigarettes, he still has his own viewpoints on using alcohol. Whether the interviewees are for or against their parents' attitude, all of the reasons why they have the answers agree or disagree are simply because if their own beliefs or their independent thoughts are consistent with their parents' attitude. In spite of the fact that three of the interviewees do not totally agree with their parents' attitude, there is still a relatively high possibility for college students to agree their parents' attitude toward alcohol or cigarettes.

3.4 College students do have a tendency to think their parents' attitude has influenced their drinking and smoking habits.

As this study aims to find out how the perceived parental permission on alcohol and cigarettes influences college students drinking and smoking habits, the analyzation of the last question might shed the light on this question. Liu said,

Excerpt 11. I totally agree my parents' attitude and their attitude does influence my habits because I value my parents' thoughts pretty much. And I do not want to do things that makes them upset or worried.

Given that parents are probably the most important people in our lives, we would

somewhat value their thoughts to some degree. Moreover, another reason might probably because our parents have experienced much than we have. Along these lines, Chou said,

Excerpt 12. Yes, to some degree, I think they still have impact on my behaviors. Though I drink and smoke, I still think of their words and drink less and smoke less.

Based on these data, we can find out that parents' perspective has undoubtedly influenced college students' habits to some degree. However, Lin and Wu said that their parents' attitude has absolutely no influence on their drinking and smoking habits. Although two of the interviewees do not think their habits have been affected by their parents' attitude, there is still a high tendency for college students to think their parents' attitude has influenced their drinking and smoking habits. In conclusion, based on the above-mentioned findings, it is pretty clear that Perceived Parental Permission does play a role in college students' perspective on drinking and smoking and also affects their using alcohol and cigarettes in college.

Discussion

The above research shows a vote of confidence for a number of conclusions about how Perceived Parental Permission has influenced college students' drinking and smoking habits. First of all, parents have a higher tendency to permit college students to use alcohol than smoke cigarettes. Based on the interview data, there is an evidence shows that parents ban their children from smoking mainly because cigarettes are bad for the health condition (e.g., Douglas et al., 1997; Hoban & Leino, 2006) and can cost lots of money. Moreover, based on the analysis, college students tend to agree their parents' thoughts on alcohol and cigarettes. Unlike a previous study that college students who perceive their parents to hold permissive views about their alcohol use engage in heavier drinking (Calhoun et al., 2017). If we combine the first and the second findings, we will find out that college students tend to agree their parents' positive attitude toward alcohol. Although students think their parents hold permissive views about their using alcohol, not all of them are heavy drinkers. However, since the last finding shows that college students think that their parents' attitude influences their habits to some degree, we still cannot underestimate the importance of how family factors influence alcohol abuse problem in college. Along these lines, some previous studies (Abar et al., 2009; Varvil-Weld et al., 2014; Walls et al., 2009, Asbridge et al., 2005; Avenevoli & Merikangas, 2003; Kristjansson et al., 2008; Kuendig & Kuntsche, 2006; Simons-Morton, 2004) also suggest this similar result that students' perceptions

of whether and how much their parents think it is acceptable for them to drink, is associated with college students' drinking quantity.

The analysis has concentrated on Asian college students; as a result, the findings do not thoroughly reflect the thoughts and situations of students apart from Asian college students. This means the results of the study cannot be taken as evidence for college students around the world because there might be some changing factors. For example, cultural differences, education and the instinct of different race. Also, there is only one female interviewee among the eight of them. As a consequence, the lack of the female participants means that we cannot be certain of whether the gender of the students would affect their parents' thoughts of permitting them to use alcohol.

In this study, without a doubt, we have found that family factors do play an important role in college students' using alcohol and cigarettes. Consequently, researchers could do research on how other factors affect college students' drinking and smoking habits. For example, social factors, mental factors and cultural factors. Down the road, we can combine these studies to figure out some precautions of alcohol abuse or at least come up with some methods to reduce the rate of students' alcohol abuse problems.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Do you drink alcohol or use cigarettes? When was the last time you drink alcohol or use cigarette?
2. What is your parents' attitude about your using alcohol in college?
3. Do your parents explicitly or implicitly say yes or no to your using alcohol and cigarettes? Why? How do you know it and how do they present it?
4. Are you agree or against your parents' attitude toward your using alcohol and cigarettes? Why?
5. Do you think your parents' attitude has influenced your drinking and smoking habits? Why and how?

Appendix 2: Coding Scheme and Examples

Major categories	Sub-categories		Examples
Parents' attitude	Parents' attitude toward alcohol	agree	My parents explicitly said that they allow me to drink alcohol, but I cannot drink too much. (Liu)
		Disagree or not sure	I don't know what was his parents' attitude because they never talk about issues about alcohol with me. (Li)
	Parents' attitude toward cigarettes	agree	My mom thinks it's acceptable. (Chou)
		disagree	My mom is totally against my smoking cigarettes. She thinks it's a bad social habits. (Wu)
	Reasons for permitting students to drink		Drinking is fine. You can make many friends by drinking with them (Wu)
			They always urge me to drink in family gatherings so I can be trained to drink (Chang)
	Reasons for disagreeing with students' smoking cigarettes.		My mom said that because smoking cigarettes can do harm to my health and cost me lots of money. (Wu)
			Smoking is a bad habit which is harmful to health and other family members. (Chang)
	Reasons for permitting students to smoke.		My dad said that smoking can relieve the tiredness of an exhausting day. (Wu)

College students' perspective	Perspective on alcohol	Agree with their parents' attitude	I agree my parents' attitude because I believe that drinking is a kind of entertainment but not necessary for human. (Liu)
		Disagree with their parents' attitude	I do not listen to them to drink alcohol because I like to stay sober (Chang)
	Perspective on cigarettes	Agree with their parents' attitude	I agree. I myself do not like to smoke. (Wang)
		Disagree with their parents' attitude	If my parents forbade me from smoking, I would understand why they did this; but, I would not agree with it. I think I have the freedom to decide what to do. (Lin)
	Parents' attitude does influence their habits		My parents' attitude does influence my habits because I value my parents' thoughts pretty much. And I do not want to do things that makes them upset or worried. (Liu)
	Parents' attitude does not influence their habits		Absolutely not. Because I am an adult, I can decide what I want to do. (Lin)

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