# Adolescent risky drinking: Sources of alcohol and the role of parents

## Researchers

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## Summary

The project specifically explored the role of parents in supplying alcohol, as well as parental attitudes towards young people’s drinking. The project sought to:

* investigate where 13 to 17 year olds obtain alcohol;
* identify family, supervision, and peer factors associated with risky drinking; and
* determine whether there is an association between parental supply of alcohol and risky drinking.

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in seven high schools in New South Wales (NSW). Surveys were completed by 530 students (response rate 43%; mean age 16.0 years) with questions relating to their alcohol consumption, sources of alcohol, circumstances of parental supply, and peers’ consumption.

Twenty face-to-face and 12 telephone interviews were also conducted with parents, exploring:

* the extent to which the behaviours of parents follow the recommendations made in the *Parenting Guidelines for Adolescent Alcohol Use*1; and
* approaches used by parents to reduce hazardous drinking among youth.

Parents were asked about their own alcohol consumption, the nature of their relationship with their children, the behaviour and attitudes of their children in relation to alcohol, their behaviour in terms of supply of alcohol and attitudes towards their children's drinking, and household rules about alcohol consumption. The volume of alcohol provided by parents to children was not examined.

## Outcomes

The study found that 93 per cent of 13 to 17 year olds had tried alcohol, 66 per cent had consumed at least a full glass, and 40 per cent had consumed more than four drinks on a single occasion in the preceding month (risky drinking).

More than two-thirds of parents (70.6 per cent) supplied alcohol to their children. The majority of parents supplying alcohol did so for consumption under parental supervision (57.8 per cent or 40.8 per cent of all parents surveyed), with a further 22.7 per cent of parents  (16 per cent of all parents) providing alcohol to be consumed under the supervision of another adult. One in five parents (19.8 per cent) provided alcohol to their children (or 14 per cent of all parents) to be drunk without adult supervision.

Factors significantly associated with underage risky drinking were:

* parental supply of alcohol for drinking under the supervision of other adults;
* parental supply of alcohol for drinking with no adult supervision;
* number of close friends believed to have consumed alcohol in the past month; and
* the young person identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

The *Parenting Guidelines for Adolescent Alcohol Use* address key areas of concern for parents regarding young people’s drinking. However parents’ adherence to these approaches was mixed. Most parents used approaches they thought would minimise harm and promote healthy development in their children.

Parents cited friends and family as key sources of guidance on parenting behaviour and decision-making including, but not limited to, young people’s alcohol consumption. It is likely that parental behaviours are influenced by their understanding of the behaviours of other parents. Many parents stated that they felt powerless to prevent their children from drinking and believed some other parents allowed drinking.

Parents were generally unclear of the NSW laws relating to secondary supply (“I know legally I’m not supposed to”; “when they are 18 they can drink”); however most often did not supply alcohol to their children except in small quantities in the home. Many parents justified supply of alcohol to children in the home as a gradual, safe introduction to alcohol that would prevent future excessive drinking.

## Recommendations

Further dissemination of the *Parenting Guidelines for Adolescent Alcohol Use* may be the first step in providing assistance to parents, but it is likely that they would require support to effectively adopt the recommendations. Understanding the function of parents’ social networks in the creation of behavioural norms relating to alcohol consumption and supply may be necessary to understand and prevent adolescent hazardous drinking.

The researchers recommended that future research focuses on:

* the volume and contexts of parental supply of alcohol, including the circumstances of supervision;
* mapping the social networks that exist among adolescents and those that exist among their parents to explore the possibility of intervening through the creation, strengthening, or modification of parent networks;
* exploring pluralistic ignorance that exists among parents about the degree to which others permit their adolescents to drink or supply them with alcohol;
* identifying parental networks, exploring the behaviours and attitudes that exist within them, and establishing appropriate access points in order to disseminate information about norms; and
* web-based interventions to bring together parents from diverse backgrounds and with diverse views about adolescent drinking and enable parents to participate in a safe environment at times and levels that suit their needs.

## Publications and further research

1. The project was used as the basis for the design of an intervention project targeting parental behaviours in relation to adolescent alcohol consumption.
2. Gilligan C, K Kypri, N Johnson, M Lynagh, & S Love Parental supply of alcohol and adolescent risky drinking. *Drug and Alcohol Review* 2012.DOI: 10.1111/j.1465-3362.2012.00418.x
3. Gilligan C, K Kypri, D Lubman: Changing parental behaviour to reduce risky drinking among adolescents: current evidence and future directions. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2012, 47:349-54.
4. Gilligan C, and K Kypri: Parent attitudes, family dynamics and adolescent drinking: Qualitative study of the Australian Parenting Guidelines for Adolescent Alcohol Use. *BMC Public Health, 2012, 12:491.DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-491 URL:* [*https://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/491*](https://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/491)

1See: [https://www.parentingstrategies.net/guidelines\_introduction](https://www.parentingstrategies.net/guidelines_introduction/) [accessed 20 April 2012]

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/Parental-Supply-Gilligan-Kypri-2012.pdf)