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## SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON YOUNG ADULTS' ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: NORMS, MODELING, PRESSURE, SOCIALIZING, AND CONFORMITY

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**Abstract** — This study aims to assess which types of social influence are correlated with young people's (15–24 years) heavy drinking (six or more glasses) in public drinking places during the weekend. Drinking in public drinking places can be defined as a "timeout" situation. Therefore we assumed that situational factors (e.g., importance of socializing and direct pressures on drinking) would contribute more to the explained variance than variables indicating cognitive social influences (e.g., social norms and modeling). Stepwise regression analyses showed that in total 25% of the variance was explained by social norms of family and peers (15%), importance of socializing in drinking situations (7%), modeling (2%) and group size (1%). The results show that both a cognitive factor and a situational factor appear to be most strongly correlated with young people's frequency of heavy drinking in public drinking places. Within the category of situational influences those variables indicating direct social pressures were only weakly related or not significant. Studies focusing on measuring the impact of social influences may profit from including the concept of the importance of socializing and conformity as an additional factor.

When applied to alcohol consumption social influence can be described as a set of external environmental pressures influencing experimentation with or habituation to consumption of alcoholic beverages (Elder & Stern, 1986). However, both in the general literature and in alcohol studies, the different aspects of social influence are rarely specified (Bank et al., 1985; Grube, Morgan, & McGee, 1986). Even the very obvious distinction between the social influences in the actual drinking situation (e.g., size of the drinking group, pressures to drink faster) and social influences outside the actual drinking situation (e.g., the influence of parents or teachers) is rarely made.

This study distinguished cognitive from situational social influences. The two cognitive social influences defined are the perception of other person's behavior (modeling) and the perceived social norms of other people; both are assumed to be internalized as a cognition (Bandura, 1986). The two situational influences distinguished refer to the direct social pressure in the actual drinking situation and the importance of socializing (conformity tendencies) in groups (DeVries, Backbier, Kok, & Dijkstra, 1995; Flay & Petraitis, 1993).

About 80% of young people's total alcohol consumption is consumed in public drinking places during the weekend. Hence the goal of the present study is to analyze the impact of social influences on young people's weekend drinking outside home situations (Knibbe, Oostveen, & Goor, 1991).

Some survey studies include measures of norms and modeling (Bank et al., 1985; Budd, Eiser, Morgan, & Gammage, 1985; Downs, 1985; Kandel & Andrews, 1987). Several authors argue that alcohol use by adolescents follows social learning princi-

ples (Akers, 1977; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Botvin & Wills, 1985; Kandel, 1985; Margulies, Kessler, & Kandel, 1977; Smart & Gray, 1978; Stumphauer, 1983; Stumphauer & Perez, 1982). The basic elements in these learning processes are exposure to other people's drinking behavior (modeling), which is perceived as positively reinforced (Bandura, 1986; Kandel & Andrews, 1987). Biddle, Bank, and Marlin (1980) found modeling explained most of the influence of peers on adolescents' alcohol consumption. Social learning theory suggests that the observed behavior is not directly imitated but mediated by cognitions that might stimulate imitation in similar situations even on occasions when the model behavior is not observed (Bandura, 1977, 1986). However, both experimental and observational studies in natural settings show that drinkers also directly influence each other (Caudill & Marlatt, 1975; Garlington & Dericco, 1977; Van de Goor, Knibbe, & Drop, 1990). Because this direct imitation cannot be measured with self-reports, this study includes only the respondent's report about the drinking behavior of others.

Acquisition of norms, the second type of cognitive social influence, takes place through observation of behaviors and their reinforcement (Bandura, 1977, 1986) and through communication of values by others (Kandel, 1985). This information is internalized as a cognition. Parents, more likely than peers, tend to affect adolescents through normative standards (Biddle et al., 1980). Modeling and normative influences may have different and possibly conflicting implications for adolescents, since what referent persons do (modeling) may or may not be what they approve of (norms) (Bank et al., 1985). Social norms are often measured by the procedure of Ajzen and Fishbein (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Studies that include adolescents' norms on alcohol drinking report low-to-moderate correlations between social norm and alcohol drinking, depending on the situational context of the behavior (Britt & Campbell, 1977; Kilty, 1978; Schlegel, Crawford, & Sanborn, 1977).

Direct pressure is one situational social influence and can be exerted either outside drinking situations or in the actual drinking situation. In the latter case, this includes, for instance, remarks about drinking rate, remarks about the number of glasses drunk, the ordering by rounds, and group size as an important stimulant to drink more (Aitken & Jahoda, 1983; Bruun, 1959; Davies & Stacey, 1972; Harford & Spiegler, 1983; Knibbe, Van de Goor, & Drop, 1993; Margulies et al., 1977; Rosenbluth, Nathan, & Lawson, 1978; Van de Goor et al., 1990).

The second type of situational social influence, the importance of socializing and conformity, indicates both the desire to be part of the peer group and the instrumental reasons for participating in drinking situations like making new friends or getting to know a boy or girl friend. These reasons may lead individuals to adapt their drinking to the standards in the group in order to gain acceptance (Asch, 1956; Leventhal & Cleary, 1980).

Observational studies (Aitken, 1985; Aitken & Jahoda, 1983; Harford & Spiegler, 1983; Knibbe et al., 1993; Van de Goor et al., 1990) provide direct evidence of the correlation between situational social factors (e.g., direct pressure in the drinking situation) and alcohol consumption. However, in observational studies, the effects of cognitive variables like norms and the internalized effect of modeling cannot be assessed. Survey studies, however, tend to neglect situational influences such as direct social pressures, since it is difficult to obtain reliable self-reports from youngsters about these direct pressures.

Although individual drinking behavior may be governed by relatively stable cogni-

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