



## Alcohol-specific socialization practices and alcohol use in Dutch early adolescents

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### A B S T R A C T

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The present study examined the associations of alcohol-specific socialization practices and heavy parental drinking with alcohol use in early adolescents. Cross-sectional nationwide survey data from 2599 parent–adolescent (mean age = 12.16) dyads were used to conduct logistic regression analyses. Onset of alcohol use as well as infrequent and regular drinking were associated with tolerant rules and attitude as reported by adolescents, and by a tolerant attitude as reported by parents. In contrast to former studies including middle and late adolescents, parental alcohol use was not found to be associated with early adolescent alcohol use, nor did parental alcohol use influence the impact of parental rules. Restrictive alcohol-specific socialization was, independent of parental alcohol use, related to absence of (regular) early adolescent drinking. Thus, this study demonstrated that in early adolescence alcohol-specific parenting is more important for adolescent drinking than parental alcohol use.

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### Introduction

The early onset of alcohol use and the increase in the amount of drinking in young Dutch adolescents have led to an increasing interest in the role of parents in drinking behaviour of early adolescents, as parents are among the most important socializing agents in the early adolescents' lives (Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006; Marshal & Chassin, 2000; Wood, Read, Mitchell, & Brand, 2004). In addition to that, in the Netherlands parents appear to be the ones who, in most cases, provide their offspring with their first drink, thus underlining the importance of parents for early adolescent drinking (Monshouwer, Van Dorsselaer, Gorter, Verdurmen, & Volleberg, 2004). Understanding better parents' importance for adolescent drinking is thus warranted, as initiation at a young age is not only eliciting progress into more regular drinking (Monshouwer, Smit, De Zwart, Spruit, & Van Ameijden, 2003; Takakura & Wake, 2003), it also is a strong predictor of alcohol abuse and alcohol-related problems later in life (DeWit, Adlaf, Offord, & Ogborne, 2000; Hingson, Heeren, & Winter, 2006). The current study examines the relation between parental alcohol-specific socialization practices (rules and attitude about alcohol) and parental drinking on the one hand, and alcohol use in their children on the other. Most earlier research on the relation of

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parental behaviour with juvenile drinking focused on middle and late adolescents. However, almost half of the Dutch adolescents have already drunk alcohol at age 12 or younger (Monshouwer et al., 2004; Poelen, Scholte, Engels, Boomsma, & Willemsen, 2005). Due to their young age, the early drinking phase they find themselves in, and the larger influence of parents at that age, it is possible that different parental factors are related with the (onset of) alcohol use of early adolescents compared to middle and late adolescents. Thus, in contrast to earlier studies who analysed this relationship primarily in middle and late adolescents, in the present study we will focus on drinking in early adolescents.

#### *Parental alcohol use and alcohol-specific socialization*

Previous research on the impact of parents on drinking behaviour of their offspring reveals the importance of two main mechanisms; first, parental alcohol use as modelling behaviour for their offspring (Duncan et al., 2006; Hellandsjo Bu, Watten, Foxcroft, Ingebrigtsen, & Relling, 2002; Jackson, Henriksen, Dickinson, & Levine, 1997) and second, the way parents raise their children with respect to alcohol – i.e. alcohol-specific socialization – (Engels & Van der Vorst, 2003; Spijkerman, van den Eijnden, & Huiberts, 2008; Van der Vorst, Engels, Meeus, & Dekovic, 2006; Yu, 2003).

Parental alcohol use is shown to be related to the onset of early drinking (Duncan et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 1997). Parental drinking is also related to less engagement in alcohol-specific socialization practices (Ennett, Bauman, Foshee, Pemberton, & Hicks, 2001; Van der Vorst et al., 2006) and thus may influence the alcohol consumption in their offspring both directly and indirectly. Moreover, parental drinking might moderate the relation between alcohol-specific socialization practices and adolescents' drinking: (heavy) parental drinking might reduce the effect of parental alcohol-specific socialization. Although Van der Vorst, Engels, Meeus, Dekovic, and Van Leeuwe (2005) did not find such a moderation effect in a sample of middle and late adolescents, for early adolescents it may be different since the impact of parental behaviour might be stronger when their offspring is younger. Therefore, it is important to examine how parental drinking moderates the relations between alcohol-specific socialization and early adolescents' drinking.

In studying the role of parents in early adolescents' drinking by alcohol-specific parenting (rules and attitude about alcohol) and parental alcohol use, it is important to take the following two aspects into account. First, results of studies that did report on the influence of parenting behaviour on early adolescents were based on adolescent reports only. Research has shown that it is essential to include both adolescent and parent reports when assessing alcohol use and alcohol-specific socialization practices for two reasons; (1) by including multiple informants a more complete picture of alcohol use and its related factors can be constructed and (2) cross-reports of parents and adolescents on alcohol use and alcohol-specific socialization practices do not correspond completely (Engels, Van der Vorst, Dekovic, & Meeus, 2007; Smith, Miller, Kroll, Simmons, & Gallen, 1999; Van der Vorst et al., 2005; Williams, McDermitt, Bertrand, & Davis, 2003). Second, to our knowledge no studies that involved early adolescents have included rule setting, attitude about alcohol and parental alcohol use concurrently. For instance, studies looked at either parental alcohol use (Duncan et al., 2006), rules (Van der Vorst, Engels, Dekovic, Meeus, & Vermulst, 2007) or attitude about alcohol (Ary, Tildesley, Hops, & Andrews, 1993; Brody, Ge, Katz, & Arias, 2000), or involved a combination of two (Johnson, Greenlund, Webber, & Berenson, 1997; Van der Vorst et al., 2005, Yu, 2003). As all three parental behaviours have independently shown their significant associations with adolescent alcohol use, it is relevant to examine the comparative roles of these behaviours in early adolescents' drinking. Only Van der Vorst et al. (2006) included all three parental behaviours, but in this study a relatively small sample was used, with middle and late adolescents only. They demonstrated that rules and attitude about alcohol were related to less drinking in middle and late adolescents, whereas parental drinking was not found to be significantly related. It is interesting to examine what the comparative influence of these variables is in a sample of early adolescents.

#### *The current study*

The aim of the current study is to examine the association of alcohol-specific socialization practices and parental alcohol use with onset of alcohol use in their early adolescent children, using a representative sample of 2599 parent–adolescent dyads. By doing so, we will take parental alcohol use into account, both as a correlate and as a moderator of alcohol-specific socialization of their children. Based on findings concerning middle and late adolescents, we expect to find that restrictive alcohol-specific socialization (restrictive rules and attitude) lowers the risk of being engaged in drinking alcohol of their children. We furthermore assume that heavy parental alcohol use is associated with higher alcohol use in their offspring. In addition, we hypothesize that restrictive alcohol-specific socialization has stronger effects on alcohol use among adolescents if heavy parental alcohol use is absent. This study is one of the first involving a large representative sample of early adolescents and their parents to test hypotheses on the role of alcohol-specific socialization and parental alcohol use in early adolescent drinking.

## **Method**

### *Procedure*

The current study is part of a longitudinal randomized clinical trial called 'Prevention of Alcohol Use in Students'. Current analyses are based on results from the baseline-measurement, before any interventions have been carried out. A randomly

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