

Alcohol Use & High School

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In the article “Alcohol Use During the Transition From Middle School to High School: National Panel Data on Prevalence and Moderators” (2013), Kristina Jackson and John Schulenberg argue that the transition from middle school to high school influences the likelihood for adolescents to engage in alcohol use due to consequences of life transitions and other social factors. Their study places and observes adolescents within three categories including non-drinking, light drinking, and heavy drinking individuals and is aimed to observe the onset of drinking and progression towards heavier drinking within this major life transition.

Risk factors identified included gender, race/ethnicity, and levels of parental monitoring and delinquency, which were measured in order to evaluate how likely these influenced alcohol use. There were no significant differences found on progression of alcohol use between males and females, except for the final drinking levels reached; females shifted from non -drinking to light drinking levels, while males shifted from light drinking to heavy drinking levels. Race and ethnicity had no significant influence on greater alcohol use throughout the transition, but was predicted to have more of an affect on minority adolescents.

Parental monitoring had a highly significant influence on levels of alcohol use during high school transitions. High parental monitoring resulted in greater amounts of non-drinking adolescents. However, post-high school transition observations showed that those who were highly monitored were more likely to shift from light drinking to heavy drinking levels, meaning most adolescents had already figured out loopholes around these parenting styles. Delinquency was another influential factor where higher levels of delinquency predicted a greater likelihood for the initiation of alcohol use and heavy drinking.

Strengths within this longitudinal study included obtaining a large representative sample, examining both initiation and progression of alcohol use, and controlling for age and school transition timing. Some limitations included cutting out other risk factors that have proven to influence alcohol use in previous studies such as peer influence and socioeconomic status. In addition, levels of parental monitoring were gathered through self-reports from parents that could result in differing perceptions on what monitoring entails. In addition, annual data collection resulted in “measurement gaps” where adolescents were observed to exceedingly shift from non-drinking to heavy drinking levels during this time. This was a concern due to the possibility of the presence in gradual drinking progression not having been recorded, skipping over the light drinking levels amongst these adolescents. Finally, there was no significant evidence for these researchers to confidently conclude whether the increase in alcohol use resulted primarily from high school transitions or age advancement.

Though there may be information gaps within this study, research claims for links between transitions from middle school to high school and increase in alcohol use amongst adolescents can be assured. Future studies are suggested to focus on further potential risk factors as to why this is the case due to the high prevalence of this event. Further research is needed to efficiently implement programs that can target positive parenting styles and decrease levels in delinquency in order to control drinking levels amongst youths.

References

- Jackson, K. M., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2013). Alcohol use during the transition from middle school to high school: National panel data on prevalence and moderators. *Developmental Psychology*, 49 (11), 2147-2158. doi:10.1037/a0031843