

# ***Research on the Relationship Between Parental Absence and Alcohol Consumption Behavior among College Students Aged 18-24***

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**Abstract:** In contemporary society, the health and behaviour of college students are highly valued. Alcohol consumption is particularly common among university students and has far-reaching consequences. Changes in family structure have increased parental absence. However, there is a paucity of research examining the impact of parental absence on risky drinking among adolescents in the general population. This article aims to investigate the effects of parental absence on the drinking behavior of college students aged from 18 to 24. Using a convenience sampling method, the study collected survey data from 254 college students in Wuhan with a history of alcohol consumption. The findings indicate that parental absence may indirectly foster drinking behavior by impacting the psychological well-being, social interactions, and values of college students. This article identifies a potential correlation between parental absence and the drinking behaviour of college students, and further examines the psychological processes and social factors that may underlie this relationship.

**Keywords:** Parental absence, College students' drinking behavior, Psychological health

## **1. Introduction**

Alcohol consumption on university campuses has been recognized as a significant problem. In 2012, approximately 63% of young men and 58% of young women reported that they currently have a drinking habit. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, 2013)

Regarding the influence of gender disparities on children's drinking behavior within single-parent families, adolescents in single-father families exhibit more severe drinking and criminal behaviors, attributed to generally lower parental supervision, than those in single-mother families [1]. Research has shown that children from single parent families, regardless of whether the mother or father is absent, face higher risks and are more prone to various behavioral problems, including alcohol consumption, compared to children from two parent families. However, when controlling for confounding factors, significant results were only observed in the group living with a single father[2][3]. Furthermore, poor communication between mothers and children in single-parent families has been linked to an increase in hazardous drinking and drunkenness in adolescents [4].

Adolescents from incomplete families are often associated with alcohol abuse. In addition, the absence of either a mother or father in the family environment may contribute to an increased risk of

adolescent alcohol abuse, due to the differing yet crucial roles each parent plays in a child's development. This study aims to explore whether adolescents who do not live with either parent are at an even higher risk of alcohol abuse.

Previous studies have found that children without biological parents are more prone to alcohol abuse [3,5,6]. Importantly, adolescents who do not live with either parent owing to divorce or the death of a parent [7] have more difficulties in their socialization process, since parents are the primary socialization agents during childhood and early adolescence, shaping children's values and norms during early adolescence [5]. In particular, fragmented families increase the risk of frequent drinking and drunkenness among adolescents [4,8]. Therefore, this study predicts that adolescents who do not reside with both parents may experience poor family functioning, potentially leading to risky behaviors, including alcohol abuse [9,10].

This paper will distribute questionnaires to college students in Wuhan to investigate their drinking habits and explore the influence of parental absence on these behaviors. The findings are expected to reveal the important role of family factors in adolescents' drinking behavior and provide scientific basis for family education and intervention. Moreover, the results can provide data support for universities to formulate alcohol management and intervention policies, helping schools to develop more effective alcohol management and intervention policies. By understanding the impact of parental absence on drinking habits, college students can be guided to establish healthy drinking behaviors, promoting their overall well-being and development.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Questionnaire Survey**

This study developed a questionnaire targeting college students aged 18-24, aimed at collecting information on their drinking behavior, family background, and mental health status. The questionnaire encompassed various aspects, including frequency of alcohol consumption, reasons for consumption, parental companionship, and self-rated mental health.

#### **Intensity of Perceived Parental Absence**

One key survey question assessed the perceived intensity of parental absence during participants' upbringing, "Which parent's absence during your growing up do you perceive as stronger?" The response options were as follows: 1="Neither parent was strongly absent", 2="Father was strongly absent", 3="Mother was strongly absent", and 4="Both parents were strongly absent".

### **2.2. Participants**

Utilizing a convenient sampling method, the study distributed online questionnaires, collecting 261 responses from college students in Wuhan. After discarding questionnaires with missing or repetitive responses, 254 valid questionnaires were retained, resulting in an effective response rate of 97.3%. Of these, 149 were males (58.66%) and 105 were females (41.34%); with participants distributed across freshmen (65), sophomores (63), juniors (53), seniors (51), and those in their fifth year or older (22).

## **3. Analysis**

### **3.1. Relationship between Parental Absence and Drinking Behavior**

As shown in Table 1, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the intensity of parental absence and various aspects of drinking behavior. The results are as follows: the intensity of parental absence and its psychological or behavioral impact have a

correlation coefficient of -0.03, suggesting a weak negative relationship, which is not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). The correlation between the intensity of parental absence and school drinking is 0.09, reflecting a moderate positive correlation, also not significant ( $p>0.05$ ). The correlation coefficient between the intensity of parental absence and the drinking behavior it induces is 0.17, showing a significant positive correlation ( $p<0.05$ ), implying a positive association between the perceived influence of parental absence on drinking behavior among respondents. The correlation between the psychological or behavioral effects of parental absence and the drinking behavior it induces is 0.15, indicating a moderate positive correlation, which is significant ( $p<0.05$ ), suggesting that those who believe parental absence significantly affects their psychological or behavioral state are more likely to attribute their drinking behavior to parental absence. The aforementioned analysis highlights the correlations among parental absence, its impact on psychological or behavioral states, school drinking, and the belief in its influence on drinking behavior.

Results indicates a significant positive correlation between the perceived intensity of parental absence and the belief that such absence contributes to drinking behavior. The data indicates that individuals with a strong sense of parental absence are more likely to attribute their drinking behavior in part to parental absence. Additionally, individuals who believe parental absence significantly affects their psychological or behavioral well-being are more likely to consider parental absence as a cause of their drinking behavior.

In summary, this analysis provides evidence for the association between parental absence and individual drinking behaviors, as well as psychological and behavioral outcomes, offering valuable insights for further in-depth research into the impact of parental absence on adolescent behavior and mental health.

Table 1: Analysis of Factors Related to Parental Absence and Drinking Behavior

| project                                                    | average value | standard deviation | Intensity of parental absence | The psychological or behavioral impact of parental absence | Drinking on campus | Parental absence leads to drinking behavior |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Intensity of parental absence                              | 2.70          | 1.18               | 1                             |                                                            |                    |                                             |
| The psychological or behavioral impact of parental absence | 1.26          | 0.60               | -0.03                         | 1                                                          |                    |                                             |
| Drinking on campus                                         | 1.25          | 0.44               | 0.09                          | 0.12                                                       | 1                  |                                             |
| Parental absence leads to drinking behavior                | 1.69          | 0.84               | 0.17**                        | 0.15*                                                      | 0.51**             | 1                                           |

\*  $p<0.05$  \*\*  $p<0.01$

### 3.2. The Factors that Contribute to the Drinking Behavior

According to Figure 1, the factors that affect drinking behavior mainly include peer pressure, academic pressure, and social media influence. Among them, peer pressure is the most significant influencing factor, accounting for 40.94%, followed by academic pressure at 38.98%, and social media influence at 47.24%. Interesting, the influence of personal interests on drinking behavior is

relatively small, accounting for 25.2%. In addition, 20.08% of people believe that there are other factors that may affect their drinking behavior.

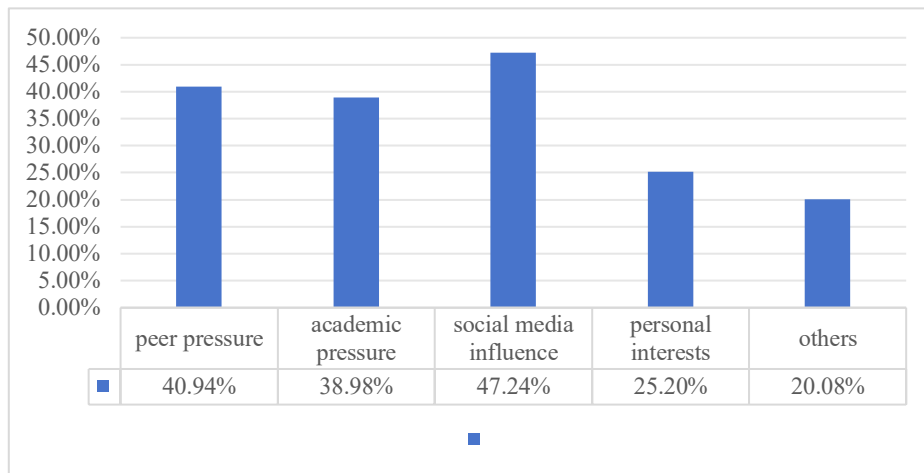


Figure 1: Other factors that affect alcohol consumption

### 3.2.1. The Dominant Role of Peer Pressure

Peer pressure, accounting for 40.94%, is the primary factor affecting drinking behavior, indicating that the phenomenon of adolescents and young adults choosing to drink alcohol in social settings is widespread due to the influence of peers or friend groups. This reflects the strong influence of group behavioral norms and peer acceptance on individual behavioral decisions. From a social psychology perspective, peer pressure often stems from the need for a sense of belonging and acceptance. Individuals may adopt behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, that align with their peers to gain social inclusion or avoid exclusion.

### 3.2.2. The Auxiliary Role of Academic Pressure

Academic pressure, accounting for 38.98%, ranks as the second most influential factor on drinking behavior. This reflects the significant impact of competitive pressure and expectations in the educational environment on individual behavior, including drinking habits. Some respondents may take alcohol consumption as a way to relieve academic stress and escape reality, indicating the need for more effective mental health support and coping strategies to help students deal with negative emotions and stress.

### 3.2.3. The Influence of Social Media is Increasingly Prominent

The data of social media influence (47.24%) reflects the influence of social media, indicating that it plays an important role in shaping and changing young people's drinking attitudes and behaviors[9]. Social media directly or indirectly influences users' drinking behavior choices and attitudes by displaying scenes, cultures, and attitudes of others drinking.

Research findings indicate that adolescents who are missing either parent are more likely to engage in alcohol abuse behavior. This aligns with previous research showing that children who do not live with their biological parents drink more frequently and in larger quantities [3,5,11].

Current research shows that there is no significant correlation between the absence of fathers and mothers and adolescent alcohol abuse. This finding does not support our hypothesis that there is a correlation between the absence of fathers and mothers and adolescent alcohol abuse. Therefore, this

research suggests that the absence of one or both parents does not have a direct, measurable effect on the likelihood of adolescent alcohol abuse, as supported by other studies. [11,12].

#### 4. Discussion

Parental absence has a certain impact on drinking behavior, the absence of parents may lead to an increase in drinking behavior among college students, but personal factors and external environment also play important roles. It is suggested that in alcohol education and prevention, in addition to paying attention to family factors, the influence of peer relationships and social environment on adolescent drinking behavior should also be emphasized. The mutual influence within peers is significant on campus. If there is drinking behavior among peers, college students may try drinking out of curiosity, imitation, or social needs. In addition, the drinking attitude of peers can also greatly affect the drinking behavior of college students. In future plans and intervention measures, it is crucial to focus on the involvement of parents (including non parental family members) in preventing adolescent alcohol abuse. Parents should strengthen their education and supervision of their children, especially in terms of alcohol consumption. They should set good examples, and avoid drinking or excessive drinking in front of their children. Additional, school should provide psychological counseling and support services to help college students cope with psychological issues such as stress and anxiety. Professional psychological counseling and consultation can help them establish a healthy mindset and lifestyle.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the above analysis demonstrates the correlation between parental absence and its impact on psychological and behavioural states, as well as on alcohol consumption and beliefs about its impact on drinking behaviour. The findings indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between the perceived intensity of parental absence and the belief that parental absence can lead to alcohol consumption. This indicates that individuals with a pronounced sense of parental absence are more prone to ascribe their alcohol consumption to the aforementioned factor. Moreover, those who perceived parental absence as significantly influencing their psychological or behavioural health were more likely to attribute their drinking behaviour to parental absence. These findings indicate the potential existence of a correlation between parental absence and individual drinking behaviour, as well as psychological and behavioural outcomes.

These results provide valuable insights into the potential connection between parental absence and drinking behaviors, as well as the broader psychological and behavioral outcomes. They offer a foundation for further research on how parental absence influences adolescent behavior and mental health. However, it is worth noting that this study employed only a correlation analysis and was therefore unable to establish a causal relationship. Future research should employ alternative research methods to corroborate these findings. With the deepening of research and the accumulation of data, through larger scale questionnaire surveys and data analysis, the precise relationship between parental absence and drinking habits among college students can be further revealed. By combining multidisciplinary perspectives such as psychology, sociology, and education, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of parental absence on drinking habits and the underlying mechanisms can be gained. Based on these insights, personalized drinking intervention plans can be developed for different family backgrounds and individual characteristics to improve the effectiveness and targeting of interventions.

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