

PRECOCIOUS ALCOHOL USE

Sociodemographic Factors as Moderators in the Associations between Youth Alcohol Use and Its Correlates

JaiAnna F. Megahan, Ashley L. Watts, William E. Conlin, Kenneth J. Sher

Department of Psychological Sciences at University of Missouri – Columbia

MU-ARTSS

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Abstract

Youth often begin sipping alcohol early in the lifespan and doing so is predictive of later substance use and misuse. Previous research has established that certain features of personality and psychopathology (e.g., impulsivity, mood disorder, thought disorder) are associated with an increased likelihood of having sipped alcohol in youth, followed by substance use and alcohol-related problems into adolescence and adulthood. What is less clear from the existing literature is whether well-established risk factors of substance use are consistent across varied sociodemographic factors (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, income, parental education). To that end, we used a large, community sample of 9- and 10-year olds ($N = 11,872$; 53% female), for which individual differences in sipping behavior have been established, and examined whether various sociodemographic characteristics moderate the associations between sipping behavior and its well-established correlates (e.g., impulsivity, behavioral inhibition and activation, psychopathology). Seventeen percent of youth in this cohort reported sipping alcohol in a nonreligious setting by ages 9 or 10, which was associated with youth-reported impulsivity, behavioral activation, prodromal psychosis symptoms, and mood and externalizing disorder diagnoses. These effects were generally consistent across sociodemographic characteristics, though effects tended to be slightly more pronounced among groups for which alcohol consumption is relatively nonnormative. Differences across sociodemographic groups were very small. Compared with male youths, sipping among female youth was slightly more associated with thought

disorder psychopathology ($D=.07$). Compared with White youth, sipping among Black youth was slightly more associated with externalizing psychopathology ($D=.12$). Our findings provide evidence that established correlates of precocious alcohol use are generally equally predictive across gender and race/ethnicity. Taken together, our findings suggest that risk profiles for drinking may be consistent across important sociodemographic factors.