

Merline, A., Jager, J., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2008). Adolescent risk factors for adult alcohol use and abuse: Stability and change of predictive value across early and middle adulthood. *Addiction*, 103(Suppl. 1), 84–99.

Abstract

Aims. To examine age-18 risk factors for alcohol use and heavy drinking during early (ages 22 and 26) and middle (age 35) adulthood, and for symptoms of alcohol use disorders (AUDs) in middle adulthood.

Design. Nationally representative samples of US adolescents in their senior year of secondary school (age 18) were followed into middle adulthood. Structural equation models estimated the associations between age-18 characteristics and current drinking and heavy drinking at ages 22, 26 and 35 and symptoms of AUDs at age 35.

Participants. The sample consisted of 21 137 respondents from 11 senior year cohorts (1976–86) from the Monitoring the Future study.

Findings. Many predictor variables had stable associations with alcohol use over time, although their ability to explain variance in alcohol use declined with increasing time lags. Being white predicted alcohol use, but not symptoms of AUDs. Parental drinking, risk taking and use of cigarettes and marijuana predicted heavy drinking to age 35. Planning to attend college predicted more heavy drinking at age 22 and less frequent heavy drinking by mid-life. High school theft and property damage predicted later AUD symptoms. Most associations were invariant across gender, with variations typically taking the form of stronger associations between predictors and alcohol use for men. Invariance in findings across cohorts indicates that results reflect general developmental trends rather than specific historically bounded ones.

Conclusions. Many adolescent individual and contextual characteristics remain important predictors of adult alcohol use and abuse, and their predictive impact varies as a function of age and type of alcohol outcome. These associations are largely equivalent across gender and cohort, thus reflecting robust developmental linkages.