Unintended Fertility and Drinking Patterns Among Young Adults

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Introduction

• The transition to parenthood is stressful
• Having an unintended 1st birth may exacerbate the stress of parenthood
• Unintended births linked to poorer parental mental health
• Less clear whether they are linked to changes in risky behavior, such as drinking (which may be a coping mechanism)

Background

• Parenthood could expedite the transition to adulthood, leading to desistance in risky behaviors
• Hypothesis 1: Over time, individuals who become parents would reduce alcohol consumption relative to childless individuals
• Stressors accompanying unintended fertility may lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms
• Hypothesis 2: Compared to parents with intended 1st births, those with unintended 1st births may experience a smaller decline or an even an increase in alcohol consumption
• May vary by type of unintendedness
• Unintended fertility occurs more frequently among disadvantaged individuals in less stable relationships
• Hypothesis 3: There is no link between parenthood/intendedness and alcohol use once accounting for socioeconomic and relationship characteristics

Current Study

• How is parenthood associated with changes in alcohol consumption?
• Does it vary by birth intendedness?
• Improves upon prior research by
  • Analyzing longitudinal data
  • Disaggregating unintendedness

Data

• Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS)
  • Longitudinal Panel Study
  • 990 Respondents
  • DV: Alcohol change from Wave 1 to Wave 5
  • Key IVs: 1st birth and intendedness
  • 4 categories of intendedness: intended, unwanted, ‘not thought about it’
  • ‘ambivalent’

Analysis

• Use OLS regression to model change in alcohol consumption from Wave 1 to Wave 5
  1. Use 3-category IV: no birth, intended 1st birth, unintended 1st birth (unwanted/ambivalent/ ‘not thought about it’)
  2. Use 5-category IV with disaggregated unintended category

Results

• Across waves, parents showed larger declines in alcohol use than childless men and women
• No differences by intended vs. unintended
• When disaggregate by intendedness, evidence that unwanted births differ from other births
• Larger decline for intended and for ‘not thought about it’ births than unwanted births
• Difference between unwanted and no birth is only marginally significant

Conclusions

• Parenthood expedites the transition to adulthood, with larger declines in alcohol use for parents than childless
• BUT, unpacking the unintended categories reveals more nuance – support for Hypotheses 1 and 2
• Need investigation into other behavioral changes to consider both internalizing and externalizing behaviors

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