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'He gave him the booze because ...' using a projective method to explore why parents provide alcohol to teenagers

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Publication Details

Jones, S. C., Magee, C. & Andrews, K. (2014). 'He gave him the booze because ...' using a projective method to explore why parents provide alcohol to teenagers. *Drug And Alcohol Review*, 33 (Supplement S1), 36.

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Abstract

Abstract presented at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs Conference 2014, 9-12 November 2014, Adelaide, Australia

Keywords

provide, parents, why, explore, teenagers, method, alcohol, projective, because, booze, him, gave, he

Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

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'He gave him the booze because ...' using a projective method to explore why parents provide alcohol to teenagers

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Introduction and Aims: Parents appear to be a common source of alcohol for adolescents. However, while adolescents frequently identify parents as the provider of their alcohol, parents appear reluctant to admit to doing so. This study utilised a projective technique to examine parents' reasons and motivations for supplying alcohol to adolescents.

Design and Methods: An online survey was conducted with 94 mothers and 83 fathers of teenagers aged <18. A projective methodology was utilised, whereby parents read a written scenario in which a parent did (or did not) provide alcohol to their 16-year-old child to take to a party. They then answered two open-ended questions about the thoughts and motivations of the parent in the scenario, followed by six Likert-style items about the parent's actions.

Results: The open-ended responses showed four main themes in reasons for non-provision of alcohol and these did not differ between mothers and fathers (safety, the law, control and trust); both mothers and fathers explained provision of alcohol under themes of fitting in, safety and harm minimisation (both genders) and being a cool parent (fathers).

Discussion and Conclusions: The study design was effective in eliciting respondents' perceptions of the motivations of these hypothetical parents. There were both similarities and differences between male and female respondents in the open-ended and scale responses. Both genders thought that by not providing alcohol the parent was making sure their child was safe and setting boundaries, but by providing alcohol they were making sure their child fit in with peers.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Our findings suggest interventions to reduce parental supply will need to address both misperceptions (such as beliefs that this is an effective harm minimisation strategy) and real conflicts experienced by parents in weighing up the perceived benefits of providing alcohol to their underage children against the risks of adolescent drinking.