Work Stress and Alcohol Use: Examining the Tension-Reduction Model as a Function of Worker’s Parent’s Alcohol Use

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Abstract

In an effort to identify groups who may be more vulnerable to tension-reduction drinking (Frone, 1999, 2003) we examine whether drinking alcohol in response to work stress varies as a function of whether workers were raised in homes where (a) both parents abstained from alcohol, (b) at least one parent drank nonproblematically, (c) at least one parent drank problematically, or (d) both parents drank problematically. Employees participating in a large, longitudinal study who reported using alcohol in the previous year ($N=895$) completed various measures of work stressors, alcohol use, and alcohol problems. We found few mean group differences for either the work stressor (Hypothesis 1) or alcohol measures (Hypothesis 2), but we did find a greater number of significant and moderate correlations between work stressors and alcohol for those reporting that both parents drank alcohol problematically (Hypothesis 3). Interestingly, a number of significant correlations were found for those reporting that both parents abstained from alcohol; few were found for the two groups reporting that at least one parent drank with or without alcohol problems. Results are interpreted in light of where and how alcohol expectancies and other coping methods are learned.

Keywords: Occupational stress, Alcohol drinking patterns, Worker’s Parents
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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that it is widely believed that increased alcohol consumption is a common response to work-related stress, empirical tests of this “spillover” or “tension-reduction” model have consistently failed to support a strong relationship (Blum & Roman, 1997; Cooper, Russell, & Frone, 1990; Cooper, Russell, Skinner, Frone, & Mudar, 1992; Mensch & Kandel, 1988). Reports of null findings or small effect sizes between work stress and alcohol consumption and problems (e.g., Lennon, 1987; Shore, 1997; Shore & Batt, 1991; Wilsnack & Cheloha, 1987; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1992) have been noted in previous investigations, prompting many researchers to develop more nuanced models to explain the relationship between work stress and alcohol (Ames & Rehun, 1996; Cooper et al., 1992). Frone (1999, 2003) has argued that moderated-mediated models – models that identify vulnerable subgroups of workers as well as the intervening linkages between work stressors and alcohol use – are a promising direction for future research. For example, escapist drinking motivations have been found to be an important moderating variable (Abbey, Smith, & Scott, 1993; Cooper et al., 1992; Grunberg, Moore, & Greenberg, 1998) as well as a mediating link in predicting alcohol use and problems (Cooper, Russell, & George, 1988; Neff, 1997). Managerial women (Moore, Grunberg, & Greenberg, 1999, 2003) workers employed in a male-dominated work environment (Kraft, Blum, Martin, & Roman, 1993), and women experiencing chronic work stress following the September 11th, 2001 attacks (Richman, Wislar, Flaherty, Fendrich & Rospenda, 2004) have been identified in previous investigations as subgroups who might be particularly vulnerable to tension-reduction drinking.
The focus of this present paper is to examine the tension-reduction response among another subgroup of employees who we posit might also be vulnerable to using alcohol in response to work stress, namely, workers whose parents had alcohol problems. Although much previous research has demonstrated the heightened risks both children of alcoholics (COAs) and adult children of alcoholics (ACAs) face for many indices of poor adjustment (e.g., Black, 1986, Giglio & Kaufman, 1990), including higher rates of alcoholism (Black, 1986; Chalder, Elgar, & Bennett, 2006; Hawkins & Hawkins, 1996) there is very little research that has examined occupational functioning per se’ (Greenfield, Swartz, Landerman, & George, 1993). The few studies that do exist have failed to find occupationally-related differences between ACAs and nonACAs; however, they have tended to examine mean group differences rather than to treat parental alcohol problems as variable that moderates the relationship between a work-related condition and alcohol use or problems. For example, Greenfield et al. (1993), reported that parental problem drinking failed to significantly predict educational achievement, occupational achievement, or occupationally-related problems, and Beardslee, Son, and Vaillant (1986) found no relationship between the severity of parental alcohol use on percentage of lifetime unemployed. A student-related proxy for work performance, grade point average, was not significantly different between ACAs and nonACAs (Hall, Bolen, & Webster, 1994). Black (1986), however, did observe that ACAs reported more “work-relationship problems” than did nonACAs.

Previous investigations that have examined coping-related differences between ACAs and nonACAs, however, speak to the way and degree to which one’s occupational functioning could be affected. Such potential coping deficits have direct implications for one’s propensity to use alcohol as a means of reducing work-related stress. Indeed, it has been argued that the
Tension-reduction Drinking

The tension-reduction model of alcohol use is well-suited to those who not only believe that alcohol will help them cope with the work-related distress, but also to those who have few other coping mechanisms that they are actively using in response to the stressors (Chalder, et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 1992; Grunberg, et al., 1998). Wright and Heppner (1991), for example, pointed to how ACAs may lack appropriate role models, putting them at greater risk for limited or poor social connections or supportive networks. These authors also noted how ACAs often perceive themselves to lack control over their environment and to possess poor problem solving skills in relationships. Clair and Genest (1987) similarly found that ACAs were more likely to report problem situations as being "unchangeable," were more likely to use emotion-focused rather than problem-focused coping techniques, and were also more likely to use avoidance coping strategies such as increased sleeping, smoking, eating, and drinking alcohol. Hall and Webster (2002) found that ACAs reported more stress and difficulty in initiating the use of varied resources in response to life events. By contrast, Hall et al. (1994) found that ACAs were more internally-control driven than were nonACAs, and Wright and Heppner (1991) found no difference between ACAs and nonACAs on measures of problem solving confidence, approach-avoidance style, personal control, or support. Other authors have even emphasized the positive coping strategies ACAs may learn, citing this as one reason for their variability in adult adjustment (Coombes & Anderson, 2000). Despite the fact that the evidence is not uniform, there is some support for the contention that ACAs may lack coping resources required for dealing with work-related stress, thereby perceiving increased work stress as compared to their nonACA counterparts. They might also model their alcoholic parent’s strategies that include avoidance and escape-related tactics (Chalder et al., 2006; Clair & Genest, 1987; Greenfield et
al., 1993); arguably, escape motivations for drinking alcohol could also be learned (Chalder et al., 2006).

In addition to examining the spillover model of work stress and alcohol use and problems between workers with and without parents who have alcohol problems, we explore whether this relationship is stronger among those where both parents are reported to have had alcohol problems. Cumulative risk theory (Coffelt, Forehand, Olson, Jones, Gaffney, & Zens, 2006) would predict that having both parents use alcohol problematically, rather than only one parent, places two rather than one risk factor in a child’s environment. Although direct tests of this theory with respect to the number of problem-drinking parents has been relatively sparse, researchers have reasoned that having both parents drink problematically could put one at greater risk for any number of reasons. In addition to heightened genetic vulnerability, there is greater environmental instability in the home and less chance to model useful coping responses when both parents misuse alcohol. Although Coffelt et al. (2006) found no difference between one versus two alcoholic parents when predicting adolescent alcohol use, Beardslee et al. (1986) did find that with greater exposure (measured in terms of degree of impact and disruption to the home) the chances of problem drinking, alcohol dependence, time spent in jail, and sociopathy increased.

Based on this review, we test the following hypotheses:

H1: As compared to workers with abstaining parents or parents who did not have alcohol problems, work-related stressors will be significantly greater for employees with one parent who had a problem with alcohol. In turn, employees with two problem-drinking parents will report significantly higher work-related stress as compared to all other groups.
H2: As compared to workers with abstaining parents or parents who did not have alcohol problems, escapist reasons for drinking, alcohol consumption, and alcohol-related problems will be significantly greater for employees with one parent who had a problem with alcohol. In turn, employees with two problem-drinking parents will report significantly higher levels of all alcohol measures as compared to the other three groups.

H3: As compared to workers with abstaining parents or parents without alcohol problems, the correlations between work stressors and alcohol measures will be stronger for workers who report that one parent had a problem with alcohol; in turn, this relationship will be strongest for workers who report that both parents had problems with alcohol.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

As part of a larger, longitudinal study that examines the effects of work-related change on employee well-being, 2142 respondents who had responded to at least one previous data collection were mailed a letter and survey to their home. One thousand, one-hundred three (51%) responded (65.6% men, 34.4% women), and of these, some 895 replied that they had consumed alcohol in the past year and were included in the analyses. The mean age of this subset of 895 participants was 50.3 years (SD = 7.7), and on average, they had been employed by the company 22.1 years (SD = 7.2). Responses were obtained from workers across all pay categories including 12.4% engineers, 17.7% hourly, 38.2% managerial, 14.3% professional-nonexempt, and 17.3% professional-exempt. Because of the questions posed in earlier phases of the research, we had oversampled women and managerial workers; thus, the present study was comprised of a greater percentage of these two groups relative to their representation in the company (20% women, 10% managerial).
2. 2. Procedures and Materials

This data collection effort was the fourth and final survey administration comprising a longitudinal study that explored the impacts of work change and stress on health. At Time 1, we developed a multi-item survey that asked workers to report work experiences, job attitudes, and health-related outcomes that was based on our review of the relevant literature and interviews and focus groups conducted with employees. At Times 2, 3, and 4, we followed similar procedures in revising the survey; we also met with company officials to make available findings from the previous data collection. In advance of the Time 4 survey administration, we sent potential respondents a letter reminding them of their previous participation and of the researcher’s independence from the company, asked them for their continued participation, and promised them $35.00 compensation for their responses. A subset of the items reported in this paper are described below.

2. 2. 1. Work stressors. Previous researchers have commented that failure to find support for tension-reduction drinking may also stem from the fact that the types of work stressors included in the model may, indeed, not be stressful to employees. For example, Rospenda, Richman, Wislar, and Flaherty (2000) reasoned that only “unnecessary” forms of job stress, such as abusive treatment, may result in spillover drinking whereas more common and expected types of workplaces stressors (e.g., low decision latitude) may not. Thus, we measured six different types of work stress that have been cited frequently in the literature in an effort to identify such differential reactions. For all measures, participants responded to multi-item scales drawn from the literature. Responses were summed such that higher scores reflected higher levels of the named construct.
First, a general measure of overall job stress was included to see whether or not an affective reaction to one’s work experience was related to alcohol use. The six-item version of general job stress (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001) asked respondents to consider their job in general and to indicate whether it was, for example, “tense,” “pressured,” or “pushed.” Using the coding scheme outlined by the scale’s authors, 3 points were given for the response yes, it describes my job, 0 points for no, it doesn’t describe my job, and 2 points for I can’t decide (alpha = .82).

Next, we measured four different types of specific work stressors. The generalized workplace abuse-disrespectful treatment scale (9 items, alpha = .80) asked participants to indicate whether they had experienced particular abusive events (e.g., someone talking down to you) within the past 12 months (Richman, Rospenda, Nawyn, Flaherty, Fendrich, Drum, & Johnson, 1999). To each item, respondents indicated the frequency with which the behavior had occurred, either never, once, or more than once. Role ambiguity (4 items, alpha = .89) measured the degree to which respondents felt that their job responsibilities and work tasks were well-defined (Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980), and role overload (3 items, alpha = .77) assessed how much participants felt as though they had enough time to complete their work and that the amount of work they had to complete was fair (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983). For both role ambiguity and role overload, respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale anchored from strongly agree or very often to strongly disagree or very rarely. Armstrong-Stassen’s (1993) measure of job security (3 items, alpha = .84) asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they had been worried in the past about their job security, the degree to which they worried about it presently, and how confident they
were that they would remain employed by the company in the future. A 4-point response scale anchored from extremely worried to not worried at all was used to report the responses.

The last job stressor measured more positive work characteristics, the absence of which has been linked to job stress. Using a 5-point scale anchored from always to never, the job autonomy scale (6 items, alpha = .87) assessed the amount of freedom and control workers had in deciding which tasks to perform, in setting work goals, and in setting requirements for their work (Hrebinjak, 1974). Respondents recorded their answer on a 5-point Likert scale anchored from always to never.

2.2.2. Alcohol measures. Five separate measures of alcohol assessed various aspects of drinking motivations, alcohol consumption, and alcohol-related problems. First, escape reasons for drinking asked participants to consider how important (not important [0], somewhat important [1], or very important [2]) a given reason for drinking was to them. All reasons reflected using alcohol as means of changing one’s mood or affect such as, “drinking helps me relax” or “drinking makes me feel more in control of situations” (alpha = .74; Fennel, Rodin, & Kantor, 1981). The number of alcoholic drinks consumed in the previous 6 months was computed by asking respondents to indicate the number of times (ranging from never in the past 6 months to daily) they had drunk (a) 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks, (b) 3 or 4 alcoholic drinks, (c) 5 to 7 alcoholic drinks, and (d) 8 or more alcoholic drinks. The frequency of occasions was multiplied by the midpoint of the quantity range indicated and converted to a unit that equaled the total number of alcoholic drinks consumed in the past six months. A separate item asked participants to write in the number of days in the last 30 days they had had enough to drink to feel the effects of alcohol (days effect).
Two measures of drinking problems were also included in the survey. The CAGE scale (Ewing, 1984) asked respondents to consider the past 5 years and answer, yes or no, to whether they felt, for example, as though they should cut down on their drinking, or have felt bad or guilty about their drinking (alpha = .64). The second measure consisted of five questions taken from Jessor, Donovan, and Costa (1991) and Calahan (1970) and asked participants to indicate how frequently they had experienced various alcohol-related problems (ranging from never to 4 or more times in the past 12 months) such as driving when intoxicated or missing work because of drinking (negative consequences alpha = .61).

2.2.3. Parental drinking. In addition to standard demographic variables (e.g., gender, age), we asked respondents to consider the following: “Would you describe your family background in relationship to alcohol consumption as one where your father generally was an (a) abstainer, (b) drinker but never known to have had a problem with alcohol, or (c) drinker with alcohol problem.” Respondents were instructed to select one of these three options. The following question on the survey then asked same of the respondent’s mother. Although multi-item scales have often been used to identify ACAs, Hall and Webster (2002) noted that results from a one item measure asking participants to indicate if “either parent had experienced problems with alcoholism” did not differ from the more extensive CAST screening measure.

To create the four parental alcohol groups used in the analyses, we crossed the three levels of the father’s drinking with the three levels of mother’s drinking, resulting in nine combinations (e.g., father abstainer and mother problem drinker). Of the 891 usable responses, 163 (18.3%) reported that both parents were abstainers, 536 (60.1%) reported that at least one parent drank but neither had a problem (i.e., both parents drank without problem; mother drank without problem-father abstainer; father drank without problem-mother abstainer), 154 (17.3%)
reported that *either the mother or father had a problem* (i.e., the nonproblem drinking parent was either an abstainer or drinker without problem), and 38 (4.3%) reported that *both parents drank problematically*. Consequently, these four groups differed in the way in which alcohol consumption had been modeled by the parents as well as in the degree to which respondents had been exposed to problematic drinking and its attendant impacts.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations between the measures. We noted first that the set of job stress-related variables were weakly to moderately correlated with each other, ranging in magnitude from $r = .04$ to $r = .38$, the exception being the correlation between role overload and general job stress ($r = .54$). Thus, our assertion that our job stress-related measures tapped different components of this construct was supported. Not surprisingly given the greater homogeneity of the construct, we also found that the alcohol-related measures were more highly intercorrelated (range $r = .38$ to $r = .59$) than were the job stress variables, although not to the degree that made independent examination of each outcome uninformative. Consistent with previous research that has failed to find strong, direct associations between work stress and alcohol use or problems, we found relatively small or nonsignificant correlations between these two groups of variables (range $r = .07$ to $r = .23$ between job stressors and escape drinking, range $r = .01$ to $r = .17$ between job stressors and alcohol consumption and problem-drinking variables).

Insert Table 1 about here

Tables 2 and 3 present the means for each of the parental alcohol groups and results from the one-way analyses of variance for the job stressor and alcohol variables, respectively. For the
job stressors, only generalized workplace abuse-disrespectful treatment and job security revealed significant differences between groups. Post hoc tests revealed that the group reporting that one parent drank problematically had significantly higher levels of disrespectful treatment and lower levels of security than did those who had at least one parent drink without alcohol problems. Although these differences were consistent with Hypothesis 1, failure to detect differences on other measures as well as differences between the group reporting that both parents had alcohol problems reflected relatively weak support for this hypothesis overall.

For the alcohol measures, post hoc tests for mean CAGE scores revealed that participants who reported that both parents had alcohol problems had significantly higher CAGE scores as compared to all other parental alcohol groups. We also found that those who had at least one parent drink nonproblematically reported feeling the effects of alcohol a greater number of days in the past 30 days than did those who had abstaining parents. Means across groups for the other alcohol measures were generally consistent with our expectations of increasing alcohol problems moving from participants with abstaining parents to participants who reported that both parents had problems with alcohol. These differences, however, were nonsignificant; thus, Hypothesis 2 also was only weakly supported.

To examine whether varying degrees of parental alcohol problems differentially affected the relationships between various forms of job stress and alcohol outcomes (Hypothesis 3), we conducted a series of partial correlations between each job stressor and each alcohol measure separately for the four parental alcohol groups. As gender ($F [3,866] = 3.06, p < .05$) but not
age ($F [3, 866] = 1.44, ns$) was significantly different between the parental alcohol groups, we partialled out the effects of respondent gender in these analyses. Table 4 presents these partial correlations. As indicated in the table note, degrees of freedom differed widely between the four groups ranging from $df = 26$ (both parents drank problematically) to $df = 440$ (one parent drank without problem); thus, we cautiously comment on the comparison of the correlation’s significance between groups.

Insert Table 4 about here

With this caveat in mind, there were a number of patterns that emerged. First, we found that general job stress showed very little relationship to any of the alcohol measures for any of the groups. We also found relative to other job stress variables, greater association between generalized workplace abuse-disrespectful treatment and many of the alcohol measures, particularly for the employees who reported that their parents had abstained from using alcohol; for this subgroup, four of the five alcohol measures reached significance ($mean r = .28$). The magnitude of the correlations for the group who reported that both parents drank problematically was greater than $.20$ for three of the five correlations ($mean r = .20$ between disrespectful treatment and the set of alcohol measures).

For the remaining four job stressor variables, we found very little association to the any of the alcohol measures for the groups who reported that one parent drank without alcohol problems or only one parent drank with alcohol problems; only 3 of the 20 correlations reached statistical significance and these were within the former subgroup with much higher statistical power. By contrast, we found more moderate correlations for the group where both parents were
reported to have had alcohol problems, particularly for the alcohol measures related to escape
drinking motivations and negative consequences due to one’s own drinking. The average
correlation between each job stress variable and the set of alcohol measures for this subgroup
equaled \( r = .31 \) for role ambiguity, \( r = .25 \) for role overload, \( r = .21 \) for job security, and \( r = .25 \)
for job autonomy.

Interestingly, for two of these job stressor variables, role ambiguity and job autonomy,
the group who reported that both parents abstained from alcohol reported relatively greater
association between these job stressors and alcohol relative to the groups who had either one
parent who did or did not drink problematically. For role ambiguity, the mean correlation across
the five alcohol measures equaled \( r = .20 \) for the abstaining parents group versus \( r = .06 \) and \( r = .05 \)
for the groups where one parent drank without problem or one parent drank problematically,
respectively. For job autonomy, the mean equaled \( r = .14 \) for the abstaining parents group
(versus \( r = .03 \) and \( r = .07 \)) for the other two groups, respectively. This pattern was not observed,
however, for the role overload or job security measures.

In an effort to summarize the pattern of correlations more simply, we counted the number
of partial correlations within a given range for each of the four parental alcohol groups. Setting
aside the issue of statistical significance, examination of the number of correlations within a
given range of magnitude illustrates the relatively stronger relationship between job stress and
alcohol for the group who reported that both parents drank problematically. Of the 30 partial
correlations conducted for each group, 10 are greater than \( r = .30 \) for the group reporting that
both parents drank alcohol problematically while the abstaining group has three correlations and
the other two groups have none. Of interest is the relatively greater number of very low
correlations for the group reporting that at least one parent drank without any alcohol problems.
Given that this drinking pattern characterizes the majority of our sample, it is not surprising that previous efforts to link job stress to tension-reduction drinking have yielded nonsignificant findings in studies that fail to identify vulnerable groups of workers. See Table 5.

4. Discussion

The primary focus of the present study was to examine whether the tension-reduction model of alcohol use was more prevalent among a subgroup of workers posited to be more prone to using alcohol as a means of coping with work-related stress: those who had been raised by parents with alcohol problems. Moreover, we investigated whether having two, rather than only one parent who drank problematically, increased one’s susceptibility to such tension-reduction drinking. Predictably, our sample sizes were vastly unequal in this nonclinical sample of employees, thereby compromising the types of statistical tests we were able to perform. That noted, we argue that the amount of environmental disruption, the degree to which one had an opportunity to learn varied and effective coping techniques, and the degree to which one saw alcohol used problematically or not varied in important ways between the groups identified in this study. Thus, we believe that this categorization scheme has value despite its negative impact on statistical power, particularly in the two parents with alcohol problems group. For example, having one parent who used alcohol problematically is likely to have caused disruption in the respondent’s home; however, we also believe that the respondent still had an opportunity to see alcohol modeled more “appropriately” by the other parent. Such was not as likely if both parents used alcohol problematically.
In addition to the above-noted issues related to sample size and the limitations they placed on the types of analyses that were viable, we recognize that the Type I error rate was high for the group reporting that both parents had alcohol problems. We further acknowledge that examining patterns of correlations somewhat independently of statistical significance, places us at additional risk for making Type I errors. It is for that reason that we endeavored to examine the overall pattern of correlations rather than place much emphasis on any single correlation. Another limitation of our work concerns the use of self-report data, particularly the two single item measures, (i.e., one for the father, one for the mother) of parental alcohol problems which might have inaccurately categorized respondents. Had it been feasible, a more thorough instrument would have been preferable, despite the limited evidence we found suggesting that such single item measures did not differ from the results obtained when using longer diagnostic scales (Hall & Webster, 2002). Last, we wish to remind the reader that our cross-sectionally collected data prevents us from drawing any conclusions about the direction of causality. It is, of course, possible that those with increased alcohol use or problems experience and/or report higher levels of work stress.

Before testing the spillover model specifically, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were aimed first at examining whether greater levels of work stress and alcohol use and problems were found between the four alcohol parent groups. Consistent with the few studies examining occupational functioning, we, too, failed to find many mean group differences in reports of work-related stress, despite the fact that the literature has much to say about the diminished coping abilities of ACAs. Thus, Hypothesis 1 received only limited support. With respect to Hypothesis 2, the pattern of means for the alcohol-related variables was more consistent with our predictions, especially for CAGE where we found a significantly higher mean score for those with two
parents who drank problematically as compared to all other respondents. Other variables, however, save the single group difference for days drink to feel effects of alcohol, failed to differ significantly between groups. Furthermore, the means for the group who reported that one parent drank problematically were actually lower than the group who reported that at least one parent drank without alcohol problems for three of the alcohol measures. Thus, our data suggest that parental problematic drinking put one at greater risk for alcohol problems (but not more frequent consumption) only when both parents drank problematically. Failure to find more pronounced differences could stem from the fact that our sample, a fairly high-functioning, nonclinical group of workers, necessarily reduced the variation one might find on such measures.

Hypothesis 3, however, received more support as we found that those with two parents who drank problematically were more likely to display a spillover, or tension-reduction type of drinking in response to work stress as evidenced in the greater number of moderate partial correlations relative to the other three parental alcohol groups. We also note that this relationship was stronger for the measures assessing escapist drinking motives and alcohol problems more so than for alcohol consumption, suggesting that a certain type of problematic drinking, perhaps one that is modeled from one’s own parents, contributed to the respondent’s own type of alcohol use patterns. As mentioned previously, escape motives for using alcohol have been identified as important moderators and mediators in predicting problematic alcohol use (Abbey et al., 1996, Cooper et al., 1988; Cooper et al., 1992; Neff, 1997), but no research of which we are aware has addressed exactly how, where, or from whom one learns his or her alcohol expectancies as they relate to dealing with work-related stress. It would stand to reason, however, that parents are one important source (Chalder et al., 2006; Clair & Genest, 1987; Dalton, Bernhardt, A.M., Gibson, J. J., Sargent, J. D., Beach, M. L., Adachi-Mejia, et al., 2005;
Hussong, 2004). That we failed to find significantly higher mean escapist drinking motives for the group reporting that both parents had alcohol problems (Table 2) could reflect that this scale more generally measures using alcohol to change emotion. Respondents still could have modeled their parent’s problematic use patterns – patterns which included drinking more specifically in response to a “hard day at work,” problems with coworkers, or a more general inability to affect positive change in one’s day-to-day working environment. Clearly, understanding where and how adults have learned their alcohol expectancies is a valuable direction for future research.

Not consistent with Hypothesis 3, however, we found an interesting but curious pattern within the group whose parents both abstained from using alcohol. Although the partial correlations between work stressors and alcohol were not as strong as compared to the group where both parents were reported to have had alcohol problems, we found that respondents with abstaining parents, rather than the group with one problem drinking parent, seemed to show greater propensity to drink in response to work stress. Further complicating the picture, respondents with abstaining parents reported relatively lower (although not significantly so) levels of escape motives for drinking, alcohol consumption, and alcohol problems. Thus, despite the fact that they drank less often and had fewer alcohol problems, we found that when they did drink, it was more frequently associated with work stress.

Although we do not have the data to test possible reasons for this finding, part of the answer may stem from the various motive(s) the respondent’s parents chose to abstain from alcohol. For example, it is possible that during the respondent’s earlier childhood, his or her parents drank problematically, subsequently opting to abstain from alcohol as part of their recovery efforts. Thus, our respondents may have witnessed alcohol being used excessively,
problematically, and as a means to escape at some point during their childhood. It is also
possible that respondents who were raised in homes where alcohol was never used had very
limited exposure to light or moderate drinking, drinking for social reasons, or drinking alcohol
merely as one of many possible beverages. Presumably, even though these respondents were not
exposed to the disruption that alcoholism often brings to a family, they still may have failed to
witness “appropriate” use of alcohol. Thus, as future researchers address the issues where, how,
and from whom adults have learned their alcohol expectancies as related to work stress, the
histories of the parent’s drinking over time as well as the other adults who served as role models
during the respondent’s childhood should not be overlooked.

Within the entire sample of workers, we observed an additional pattern that is
noteworthy: of the job stressors studied in this research, we found that generalized workplace
abuse – disrespectful treatment demonstrated the strongest relationship to all alcohol measures.
Of the job stressors employed in this research, this particular type was clearly different from the
others. General job stress, role ambiguity, role overload, job security, and lack of job autonomy,
while not desired, are frequently experienced, and not unexpected work conditions.
Disrespectful treatment, however, is likely considered to be outside of the boundary of a normal
working environment. In many organizations, rules prohibiting such treatment are common.
Rospenda, et al., (2000) predicted, moreover, that such uncalled for or avoidable forms of job
stress were more likely to result in tension-reduction drinking. Future research that confirms
these findings with other forms of unnecessary types of job stress, could examine the underlying
mechanisms that make a tension-reduction response more likely in the face of these particular
types of job stressors.
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Tension-reduction Drinking


“Honey, have some smokes.” Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 159, 854-859.


Moore, S., Grunberg, L., & Greenberg, E. (1999). Alcohol Consumption, Drinking Patterns, and Alcohol Problems: Comparison of Managerial and nonmanagerial women and men, *Current Psychology 18,(3) 272-286*


Endnotes

1. We recognize that simple partial correlations (controlling for gender) between each stressor and each alcohol measure, conducted separately for each group, do not directly answer the question of whether or not parental alcohol problems moderates the relationship between work stress and alcohol use and problems. Other types of analyses that we considered, such as assuming linearity of the parental alcohol variable and using it to create an interaction term in regression analyses, seemed premature as we were not prepared to make this assumption; the findings with workers who had abstaining parents support our reluctance to assume linearity. Moreover, we thought that the type of basic descriptive analyses shown here provided a useful first step in this relatively untested subarea of tension-reduction drinking research.
Table 1

*Intercorrelations Between Variables*

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (2)</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General job stress (3)</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWA disrespectful tx (4)</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>(.80)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity (5)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role overload (6)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security (7)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>-.06*</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job autonomy (8)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>-.04*</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape drinking (9)</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>-.07*</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption (10)</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days drink to effect (11)</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAGE (12)</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td>(.64)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative consequences (13)</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.46*</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>(.61)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Internal consistency reliability estimates are in the main diagonal. *p < .05.*
Table 2  
*Group Means and Analysis of Variance Results on Work Stressor Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Parental Drinking Status</th>
<th>Both parents abstainers (0: n=161)</th>
<th>At least one parent drank without problem (1: n = 528)</th>
<th>At least one parent drank problematically (2: n=151)</th>
<th>Both parents drank problematically (3: n = 37)</th>
<th>F-test and post-hoc results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.63</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>9.64</td>
<td>nonsignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWA – disrespectful tx</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>F (3, 859) = 2.93 (2 &gt; 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.74</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>nonsignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role overload</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>nonsignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>9.16</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>F (3, 852) = 6.10 (1 &gt; 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job autonomy</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.20</td>
<td>22.47</td>
<td>21.91</td>
<td>22.81</td>
<td>nonsignificant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Group Means and Analysis of Variance Results on Alcohol Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Parental Drinking Status</th>
<th>F-test and post-hoc results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both parents abstainers 0: (n=161)</td>
<td>At least one parent drank without problem 1: (n=528)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape Drinking</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>7.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Consumption Past 6 months (Alc con)</td>
<td>103.52</td>
<td>127.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of days in past 30, drunk enough to feel effects (Days)</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAGE</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative consequences From drinking (Neg con)</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All alcohol variables transformed before analysis (square root transformation), but untransformed means are presented in table for ease of interpretation.
Table 4

*Partial Correlations*\(^a\) between *Job Stressors and Alcohol-related outcomes*\(^b\): *By Parental Drinking Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Job Stress</th>
<th>GWA-disrespectful treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Alc con</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstainer</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without problem</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem drinkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Role Ambiguity</th>
<th>Role Overload</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Alc con</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abstainer</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without problem</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>.47*</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem drinkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Degrees of freedom for the groups: Abstainer (n = 125), at least 1 parent drank without problem (n = 440), at least one parent drank with problem (n = 123), and both parents problem drinkers (n = 26). \(^a\) Partialled out the effects of gender. \(^b\) All alcohol variables transformed before correlating (square root transformation). *p < .05, t p < .10.
Table 4 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both parents</th>
<th>Job Security</th>
<th>Job Autonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Alc con</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstainer</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank without problem</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 parent drank with problem</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem drinkers</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Degrees of freedom for the groups: Abstainer (n = 125), at least 1 parent drank without problem (n = 440), at least one parent drank with problem (n = 123), and both parents problem drinkers (n = 26). * Partialled out the effects of gender. b All alcohol variables transformed before correlating (square root transformation). * p < .05, t p < .10.*
Table 5

*Frequency Count of Partial Correlations within a Given Range by Parental Alcohol Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial Correlation Range</th>
<th>Both parents</th>
<th>1 parent drank without problem</th>
<th>1 parent drank with problem</th>
<th>Both parents</th>
<th>Problem drinkers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abstainer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problem drinkers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r &lt; .10$</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r = .10$ to .19$</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r = .20$ to .29$</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r = .30$ to .39$</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r &gt; .40$</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tension-reduction Drinking