

Thesis abstract

Delinquency and problem drinking among Australian youth: a common cause psychosocial control perspective

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Delinquency and problem drinking are two commonly occurring risk-taking behaviours among youth. Relative to delinquency, far less research has focused on an integrated theoretical framework of problem drinking that considers both psychological and social factors. Based on common cause conceptualisations of youth problem behaviours, the overarching aim of the current thesis was to examine whether an existing psychosocial control theory of adolescent delinquency could be modified and extended to explain both delinquency and problem drinking behaviours among non-clinical samples of adolescents and young adults in the contemporary Australian society. In order to achieve this overarching aim, this research program employed a sequential mixed methods design that consisted of five phases.

While prevalent youth problem behaviours often co-occur, risk factors underlying delinquency and problem drinking are not usually considered together. Thus, Phase I involved a systematic review of the literature to explore whether delinquency and problem drinking share psychosocial risk factors. Providing support for a common conceptual model, shared risk factors were found and broadly encompassed within Mak's (1990) psychosocial control theory of adolescent

delinquency, with the exception of sensation seeking and peer risk-taking behaviours.

Owing to a paucity of qualitative research incorporating stakeholders' views pertaining to adolescent delinquency and problem drinking, Phase II comprised a qualitative study to determine risk factors for delinquency and problem drinking from the phenomenological perspectives of adolescents and relevant stakeholders. Risk factors tended to be congruent with the proposed revisions to psychosocial control theory as identified in Phase 1.

In order to examine risk factors underpinning delinquency and problem drinking, current and reliable instruments that accurately reflect the incidence of these behaviours among young Australians in the general population are required. Therefore, the objective of Phase III was to update an Australian measure of adolescent delinquency to ensure representation of prevalent delinquent activities and consistency with the current youth culture. The revised instrument was subsequently utilised to examine the concurrence between adolescent drinking with domains of delinquent offending.

Although the majority of research pertaining to psychosocial control theory has focused on adolescent samples, there is evidence to suggest that the extent of problem drinking is particularly concerning among

young adults in Australia. Therefore, phases IV and V tested, and found broad support for, the revised psychosocial control model to explain delinquency and problem drinking respectively, spanning from early adolescence to emerging young adulthood.

This thesis including published works, makes an original contribution to the field by using a systematic literature review, qualitative stakeholder enquiries, and empirical quantitative research to identify shared risk factors for delinquency and problem drinking, and subsequently tested, and provided broad support for, an integrated psychosocial control framework of delinquency and problem drinking along a trajectory from early adolescence to young adulthood. This research program additionally generated five self-report measures with sound psychomet-

ric properties. This thesis has highlighted the role of risk-taking peers as a potential mediator between conventional social control agents with delinquency and problem drinking, as well as establishing conceptual and empirical differences between impulsivity and sensation seeking as risk factors for youth delinquency and problem drinking.

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