



BSc in Psychology

Parental support and control for adolescents: How does it affect drug abuse, academic status and problematic behavior?

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Abstract

It is safe to say that parental support and control plays an important role in adolescent's quality of life. Parental support and control has been shown to affect adolescent's academic results, problematic behavior and substance abuse. The goal of this study was to examine the possible effects of adolescent's parental support and control compared to those who received little or no support or control. The aim of this research was to examine if parental control and parental support had any effect on adolescent's substance abuse, academic achievement and problematic behavior. The participants for this study were Icelandic grade school students from 14 to 16 years old. The results indicated that parental control and support had a significant effect on problematic behavior, substance abuse and academic success ($p < .001$). Participants who received high parental control or support got better grades, were less likely to use drugs or misbehave. These findings support the hypothesis that the right amount of parental support and control is very important for adolescents overall success.

Keywords: parental support, parental control, academic success, misbehavior, problematic behavior, substance abuse.

Útdráttur

Það er öruggt að segja að foreldra stuðningur sem og foreldra eftirlit spili mikilvægt hlutverk fyrir jákvæða útkomu hvað varðar lífstíl unglinga. Foreldra stuðningur og foreldra eftirlit virðist hafa áhrif á frammistöðu í skóla, vímuefnanotkun og vandræðahegðun unglinga. Markmið þessarar rannsóknar var að kanna möguleg áhrif foreldra stuðnings og foreldra eftirlits á skólagetu, vímuefnanotkun og vandræðahegðun unglinga samborið við þá sem fengu lítinn sem engan stuðning og eftirlit. Þáttakendur þessarar rannsóknar voru grunnskólakrakkar um land allt á aldrinum 14-16 ára. Niðurstöður gáfu til kynna að fylgni var milli foreldrastuðnings og foreldra eftirlits og skólagetu, vímuefnanotkun og vandræðahegðun ($p < .001$). Þáttakendur sem fengu góðan foreldrastuðning og gott eftirlit voru mun líklegri til þess að ganga betur í skóla, halda sig frá eiturlyfjum og vandræðahegðun. Niðurstöður styðja við tilgátu þessarar rannsóknar að foreldra stuðningur og foreldra eftirlit sé nauðsynlegt hins vegar ekki í of miklu magni því þá geti það haft öfug áhrif.

Leitarorð: foreldra stuðningur, foreldra eftirlit, velgengi í skóla, vandræðahegðun, vímuefnanotkun.

Parental support for adolescents: How does it affect drug abuse, academic status and problematic behavior?

The years of adolescence is the time where sensation seeking seems to be most common. Sensation seeking is the act of seeking out for new and intense experiences which can lead to problematic behavior. Problematic behavior is referred to as an act which carries a negative consequence with it. Robbery, arrest, school dropout and sensation seeking through drugs are a couple of examples of common problematic behaviors. (Pharo, Sim, Graham, Gross, & Hayne, 2011; J.J.Arnette, 1995; Arnette, 1995, 1992). There has been an increased interest in understanding how family life of adolescent's can play a vital role in the development of problematic behavior in children at an early age. Parenting style, parent-child communication and parental modeling have been said to influence adolescent's behavior (Hayman, 2002).

How parenting styles can affect adolescents

What kind of parental support children get does matter. Previous studies have tried to explain what is meant with the definition of controlling parents. The most common explanation would be parents who are demanding, dominate, protect, punish and restrict. Other terms include parents who are possessive, authoritative and strict. These terms are somehow correct in relation to what parental control is, but contemporary work has described parental control to be more by guidance rather than control and pressure which seems to be more effective in relation to adolescent's well-being (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009).

Furthermore, too much supervision has shown to have a negative effect on adolescent's behavioral outcomes. For example, harsh parenting style can be one key factor leading to a child's violent behavior (Dishion et al., 2008). Authoritative parenting style seems to be the most effective when it comes to parenting. Such as checking on their children and knowing their social status, engaging in their children's lives and being supportive seems to be an effective way of parenting.

These parents often try to explain to their children the reasoning behind things instead of trying to control them. This is what is referred to as parental control and parental support in present study. Parents can also be controlling but show little or no warmth, that kind of parenting style is called autocratic and has not shown to be an effective way of parenting. Autocratic parenting style can lead to some maladjustments in the child's life, such as isolation, little or no social life and disorders. (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). Opposite to autocratic parenting style is permissive parenting where parents who are very kind to their children but do not show exert any control. The parents who show no warmth or control is called an unengaged parenting style. The unengaged parenting style is correlated with adolescents reckless behavior such as violent behavior, skipping school, delinquency, alcohol and drug use and so on (Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996).

It is clear that parenting style can affect children in both negative and positive ways. Parents who are harsh and unloving are having a negative effect on their children whereas if control and affection is given in the right amount, it is likelier to have a positive effect.

Parental support in relation to adolescent's problematic behavior

In previous studies, the connection between various family variables, psychological problems and bad behavior in children has been examined. Psychological problems in adolescence, violent attitude and peer victimization have been linked to a negative family environment. The development of psychological problems and negative behavior in adolescence often come from the lack of parental support, family arguments and negative communication with parents. Most often when looked into an adolescent's home, it reveals a negative environment if their bad behavior co-occurs with psychological problems. A positive environment at home as well as good communication between the parents and the adolescent have shown to be a protective way against behavioral problems (Estévez, Musitu, & Herrero,

2005). A study conducted by Bolton et al. (1977), which was one of the pioneering studies concerning this topic, it was revealed that maltreatment in childhood has a negative effect on children. In Bolton's research an example of 5,392 children from Arizona was examined where the children had suffered from maltreatment in childhood with a comparison group of approximately 900 siblings who had not been maltreated. Their results showed that 16% of the maltreated children had juvenile records for misconduct whereas only 8% of the non-maltreated children (Smith & Thornberry, 1995).

Wellbeing of children depends a lot on family life. It has shown to be important that parents are assertive of their child's behavior and decision-making, and associate with their children on a daily basis, offer them their help and support and are aware of their daily activities, circle of friends as well as academic results. The adolescents who get this kind of support are less likely to engage in problematic behavior, drop out of school and use drugs (Parker & Benson, 2004; Jessor, 1991; M. R. Sanders & Sanders, 1999).

Parental support in relation to adolescent's substance abuse

Support from parents and other adult individuals has been found to be a protective factor for drug use. An experiment on adolescents aged 12 - 15 years old indicated that poor support from both mother and father was correlated with tobacco use, alcohol drinking and drug use such as marijuana smoking. If adolescents feel they can safely look to their parents when in need they become better at coping with their emotions which can be an important protective factor for drug abuse in various situations. This way, children learn to deal with emotions instead of using substances to repress them (Wills & Cleary, 1996). Youth who have poor communication support from home are also more likely to give under peer pressure when it comes to substance use (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000).

Rules and boundaries are an effective way to show support and control. Such as supervising homework, knowing where your children are late at night and with whom. Adolescents seem to be less likely to try drugs at an early age if they get parental support from home of this kind (Griffin et al., 2000).

Parental support in relation to academic performance

Academic achievement of adolescents has also been studied in relation to the support the children get from home. Studies show that when parents provide their children with a good study environment at home and where parents help and support their children, the children show better reading and mathematics performances. (Jeynes, 2016; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In a study done by Coleman, he said that it doesn't matter how good the school is if the family background the children have is not good, then their academic achievements won't be either (Sanders, 1998). Students who are disengaged from school and skip classes and perform poorly are much more likely to drop out of school as well as engage in other problematic behavior (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). That can mean that they do not attend classes regularly, they do not do their homework or concentrate during study hours, they often break school rules and also tend to get worse grades.

With previous research in mind it is expected that parents who provide their children with good parental support would influence the outcomes of their children's academic achievements. Positive involvement and investment in children's education has shown to have positive effect on academic results.

The main hypothesis of present research is that the better the parental support and control the higher the prevalence to academic achievement, less problematic behavior and less drug use.

Method

Participants

The present study uses data from a cross-sectional national survey, Youth in Iceland 2016, conducted by Rannsóknir og greining (R&G). A total of 2021 out of 2039 students from secondary schools in Iceland in 8th, 9th and 10th grade, participated in the survey. The overall response rate was 99.1%. A research sample of 2021 respondents, was randomly chosen. These were 980 boys (48.1%) and 1041 girls (51.1%). The age range was from 13 to 16 years old. The participants were not paid a fee to participate in the study. A letter of authorization was sent to participants' parents for ethical matters since the participants were under the age of 18. Nobody was obligated to participate

Instruments and measures

The questionnaire used in this study is called Ungt Fólk 2016 and is a questionnaire used and made by the Icelandic Center for Social Research and Analysis (R&G). They developed a five item question for assessing parental control which was used in this study to measure the amount of parental control that the kids received. Participants answered the questions on a likert scale by rating from 1 (low support) to 3 (very good support) how easy or difficult they felt it was to receive the following from their parents: *warmth and affection, conversations about personal matters, advice about school-related matters, advice concerning other projects and help from parents with various tasks*. These following questions were combined using the mean score. Chronbach's alpha showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.871$).

The same was done to measure parental control and parental support. Although parental control was measured with an eight item questionnaire. The participants answered on a likert scale ranging from 1 (low control) to 3 (much control) based on how much or little the following topics related to them: *academic achievement matters to parents, rules are made by parents*

regarding what they can do at home as well as outside from home, parents make curfew rules, parents are aware of with whom and where they are at night and parents know their kids friends and their parents as well. All the variables were combined and the mean was taken. Chronbach's alpha showed a rather high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.785$).

Academic success was assessed with questions from the Ungt fólk questionnaire, asking what the kids grades were last fall in the subjects of Icelandic, English and mathematics. The participants answered on a likert scale from 1 (grades under 4) to 8 (grades around 10) what grade they got in all three classes. The mean grades in all three classes was calculated and used to assess academic success in this study. Chronbach's alpha showed a rather high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.747$).

Furthermore, a 12 item questionnaire was used to assess adolescents drug use. The questions asked how often the individuals had tried the following drugs: *sleeping pills or stress relievers, hash, marijuana, amphetamin, MDMA, LSD, e-pills, cocaine, rampant, mushrooms, sniff or ritalin as a drug.* The participants answered on a likert scale rating from 1 (never) to 8 (more often than 40 times) based on how often they had tried the following drugs. The questions were also combined here by calculating the mean. Chronbach's alpha showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.866$).

Lastly to assess problematic behavior, a six item question was used. The questions asked how often for the past 12 months the participant had done the following: *broken the rules at home, broken the rules in school, got into a fight, skipped school, ran away from home or got into trouble for lying or stealing.* Participants answered on a likert scale rating from 1 (never or nearly never) to 4 (almost always or always). The questions were combined here as well by

calculating the mean score of the answers. Chronbach's alpha showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.805$).

Procedure

The Data used for this study is data from R&G since 2016 that the researcher has been given access to. The questionnaire „Ungt fólk 2016“ was taken by all 8th, 9th and 10th graders in Iceland except for those who did not get approval from their parents. Before the questionnaire was presented to the participants they had to get approval from their parents to participate.

Data analysis

Chronbac's alpha was used to measure internal reliability of the variables measuring problematic behavior, substance abuse and academic achievement. Two way anova (FANOVA) was used to measure the effects of parental control and parental support to measure problematic behavior, substance abuse and academic achievement. The data was analyzed in the computer program SPSS statistics

Results

In the present study the effects of parental support and control on substance abuse, problematic behavior, and academic success was studied. Descriptive statistics for the three dependent variables are presented in table 1. Problematic behavior and substance abuse was low. In the sample 14.7% had low parental support. 45.4% had good parental support and 39.9% had very good parental support. Furthermore 31.2% had low parental control. 35.2% had average parental control and 33.6% had high parental control.

Table 1.

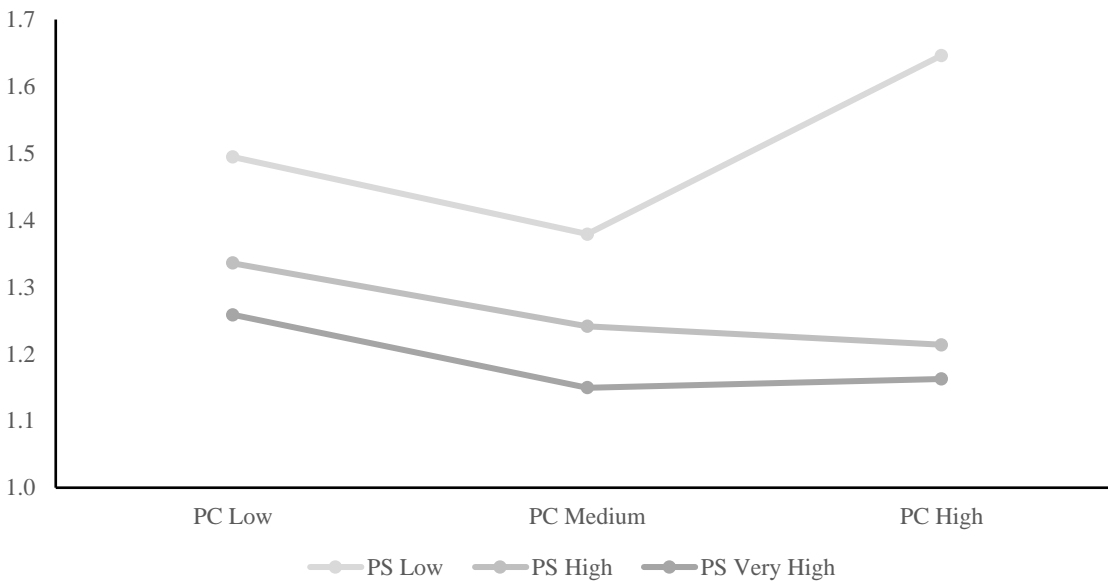
Descriptive statistics for all three dependent variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Substance use	1967	1.06	0.311	1	7
Problematic behavior	2021	1.26	0.413	1	4
Academic success	1994	5.76	1.300	1	8

Fanova was used to assess if parental control and parental support had effect on problematic behavior. The results indicate that parental control had a significant effect on problematic behavior ($F(2,1998) = 9.610, p < .001$). Those who had low parental control had higher problematic behavior ($M = 1.36; SD = 0.461$) than those who had medium ($M = 1.22; SD = 0.350$) or high parental control ($M = 1.22; SD = 0.402$). Parental support had a significant effect on problematic behavior ($F(2, 1998) = 55.039, p < .001$). Those who had low parental support ($M = 1.49; SD = 0.574$) had higher problematic behavior than those who had high ($M = 1.34; SD = 0.404$) or very high parental support ($M = 1.26; SD = 0.382$). There was a significant moderation effect between parental support and parental control on problematic behavior ($F(4, 1998) = 4.327, p = .002$). Those who had low support and high control had the most problematic behavior. However among those who had high or very high parental support, the ones that had low parental control had the most problematic behavior (see figure 1).

Figure 1

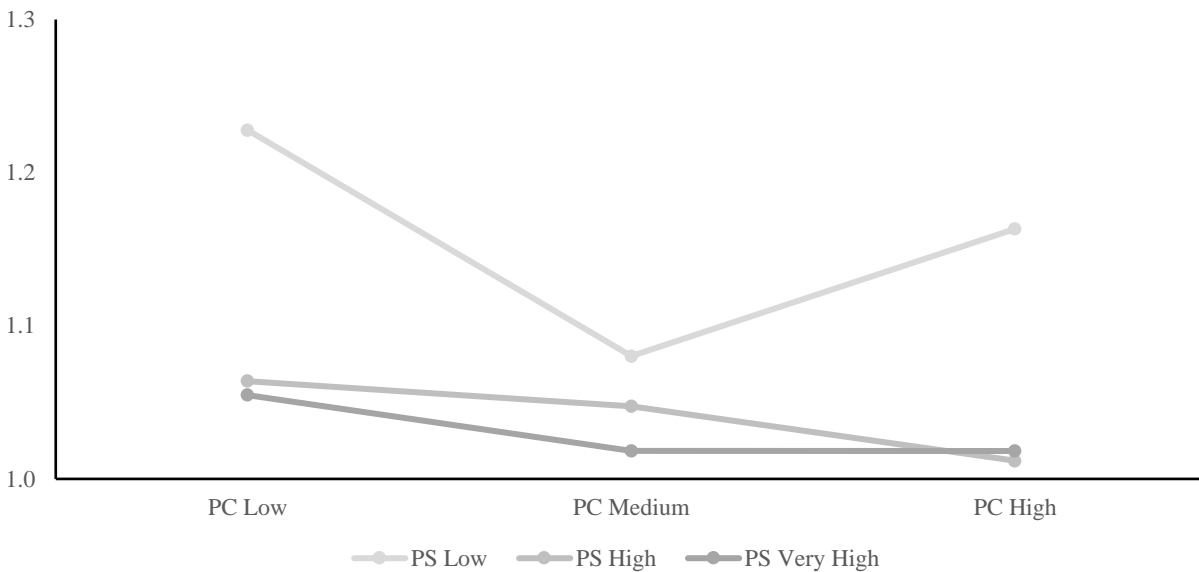
Mean for effect of parental control and parental support in relation to problematic behavior



Fanova was used to assess if parental control and parental support had any effect on substance abuse. The results indicated that parental control had a significant effect on substance abuse ($F(2, 1942) = 7.998, p < .001$). Those who had low parental control had higher substance abuse ($M = 1.11; SD = 0.429$) compared to those with medium ($M = 1.04; SD = 0.185$) or high parental control ($M = 1.03; SD = 0.157$). Parental support had a significant effect on substance abuse ($F(2, 1942) = 18.652, p < .001$). Those who had low parental support ($M = 1.18; SD = 0.550$) had higher substance abuse than those who had high ($M = 1.04; SD = 0.208$) or very high parental support ($M = 1.03; SD = 0.176$). There was a significant moderation effect between parental support and parental control on substance abuse ($F(4, 1942) = 2.409, p = .047$). Among those who had low support, the ones who had very high control or low control were more likely to abuse substances than those who had medium control. On the other hand, among those who had high support, substance abuse decreased with higher control.

Figure 2.

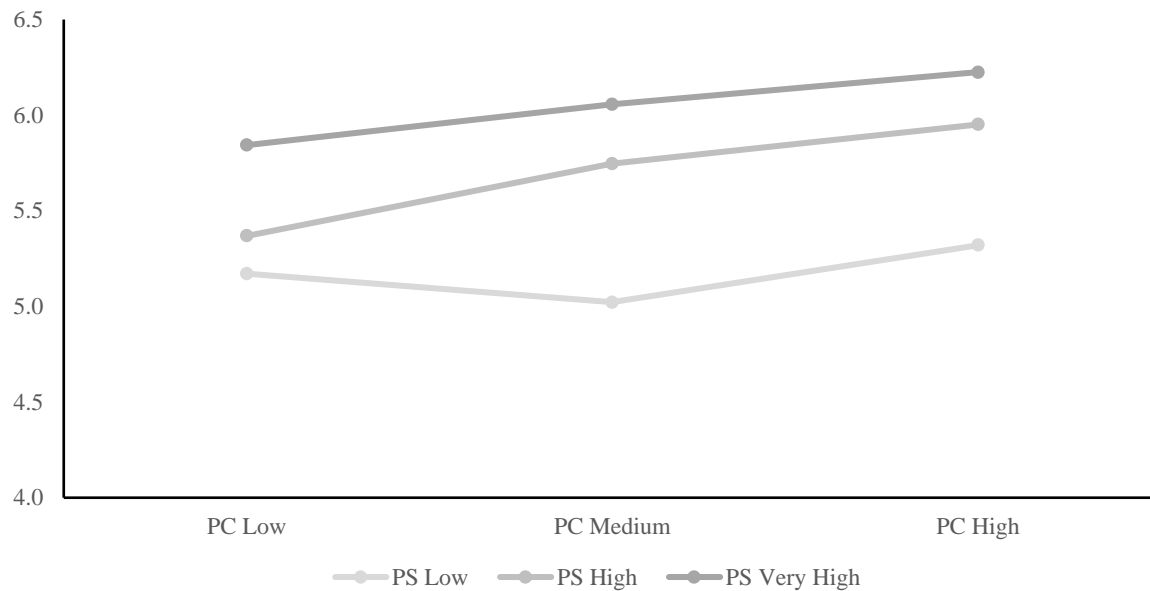
Mean for effect of parental control and parental support in relation to substance abuse



Fanova was used to assess if parental control and parental support had any effect on academic success. Parental control had a significant effect on academic success ($F(2,1962) = 9.340, p < .001$). Those who had low parental control ($M = 5.43; SD = 1.326$) had lower academic success than those who had medium ($M = 5.80; SD = 1.230$) or high parental control ($M = 6.05; SD = 1.261$). Parental support had a significant effect on academic success ($F(2,1962) = 43.689, p < .001$). Those who had low parental support ($M = 5.17; SD = 1.397$) had less academic success than those who had high ($M = 5.37; SD = 1.313$) or very high parental support ($M = 5.84; SD = 1.176$). There was no significant moderation effect observed between parental support and parental control on academic success ($F(4,1962) = 2.060, p = .084$).

Figure 4.

Mean for effect of parental control and parental support in relation to academic achievement



Discussions

The aim of the present study was to examine the amount of control and support parents give to their children and if that could have a positive effect on adolescents' drug use, academic achievement and problematic behavior. The main findings showed that parental support and parental control had a significant effect on adolescents. Children who received high parental control and high parental support had overall much higher grades, showed less problematic behavior and substance use. The low parental support group and parental control showed worse grades, more misbehaving and higher prevalence with drug use.

Previous studies support the hypothesis of this research that parental control is crucial for adolescent's overall success. Lack of parental support and control can often lead to arguments at home and negative communication, which is strongly linked to psychological problems and bad behavior (Estévez et al., 2005). A study by Bolton et al. (1977) showed that maltreatment in childhood led to misbehavior of children who later had juvenile records. In his study he had a

comparison group of children who received a good amount of control and support from parents whereas 8% of those children had juvenile records. The maltreated children showed a higher prevalence of problematic behavior where 16% of them had juvenile records which is two times more than that of the comparison group (Smith & Thornberry, 1995). It is important for children to be partially controlled by their parents because sensation seeking during adolescence is very high and they may not be aware of the consequences of their actions. It has been shown that assertiveness from parents is important alongside with association on a daily basis, where parents are aware of their children's daily activities, circle of friends and so on. This kind of support is more likely to prevent problematic behavior in adolescence (Parker & Benson, 2004; Jessor, 1991; M. R. Sanders & Sanders, 1999). The results of the present study support the findings of the literature, that kids who felt it was easy to get help from their parents, kids who communicated well with their parents, kids who had parents who checked up on them at night and parents who knew their kids circle of friends, were less likely to misbehave.

Previous studies regarding parental support and drug use showed similar results as the present study. A study with adolescents, aged 12 - 15 years old, showed that poor support, meaning that adolescents cannot look to their parents safely when in need, were more likely to engage in tobacco use, alcohol drinking and drug use. It is important for children to feel safe to look to their parents because it has shown to strengthen adolescent's emotional wellbeing. Poor wellbeing has a higher prevalence with substance abuse since it is a way of suppressing feelings (Wills & Cleary, 1996). Poor communication at home has shown to lead to adolescents giving in under peer pressure when it comes to substance abuse (Griffin et al., 2000). We can imagine how this makes sense whereas if kids are not well prepared emotionally from home they can be weak in these situations because they do not know their self-worth. Also, children who feel bad at

home or are not at ease with their relationship with their parents and are therefore likely to become a part of the wrong crowd just as a way for them to fit-in somewhere. This study is in congruence with previous studies on the subject matter. The kids who had less communication and received less help from their parents alongside with little or no control were the group of kids who had tried the most drugs and consumed them most often as well.

Previous studies also show that academic results improve with good amount of control and support from parents. According to a previous study, children show better reading and mathematics achievements if the environment at home is good. Good environment was meant as parents who support and help their children with homework as well as the environment at home being study friendly (Jeynes, 2016; Lee & Bowen, 2006). If parents are arguing all the time at home, or are not home at all, they cannot show support and love as well as offer their kids help with school related matters thus their academic achievement would likely drop. Academic success in adolescence is very important because kids who disengage from school start skipping classes, they start to perform poorly and are far more likely to drop out of school eventually, which can lead to all kinds of bad outcomes in life such as problematic behavior or substance abuse (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). These kids of course get worse grades and do not follow the rules from school, but good parental support can prevent these kinds of behavior. These findings support the results from current study. Kids who got low parental support and control had the lowest grades and were the kids who were also more likely to have used drugs before.

Some limitations of the study are worth mentioning. First, the measures from these findings are from self-report data, therefore there is a good chance that kids could have lied when they answered which can lead to bias. We have no proof that the answers from the questionnaires are correctly answered. Second only a few questions were assessed out of many to demonstrate

each variable, so it would probably have been more effective to use more questions for each variable to get a more precise results. Third, no gender difference was examined which would be interesting. There are few previous studies that examine gender difference regarding this topic, this is something that can be elaborated in future research. Even so, the greatest strength of the study was the large sample size of participants which make the results more reliable and representative for this age group of Icelandic adolescents.

In conclusion, the present findings confirm that the importance of parental control and support is very high regarding to adolescent's overall success. Support and control from parents is important in relation to preventing adolescents from misbehaving and using drugs as well as getting good grades in school, according to the findings of this study. This indicates that the importance of controlling children and knowing their circle of friends as well as where they are at night and having some good ground rules regarding staying out hours. Children need love and affection from their parents as well as a little strictness. It is important for parents to support their children not only by being loving and caring but also by being strict and direct with their children and redirect them from negative behavior. Idea for future studies would be to examine more what effect too much control and support can have on children, whereas this study showed that too much control alongside with no support at all led kids to engage in problematic behavior.

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