

Non-school friendships may drive adolescent alcohol use more than in-school ties

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A survey of more than 80,000 adolescents has revealed factors associated with having friends outside of school, and shows that non-school friendships are more strongly associated with alcohol use than school friendships. Rupa Jose of the University of California, Irvine, and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on February 10, 2021.

Most research on [adolescent friendships](#) has focused on ties between peers who attend the same school. While some evidence suggests that friendships between adolescents who attend different schools may have a significant influence on delinquency, few studies have explored this topic on a large scale.

Now, Jose and colleagues have analyzed survey data from 81,674 adolescents who enrolled in sixth to twelfth grade from 1994 to 1995. Participants reported how many in-school and non-school friendships they had and how often they engaged

in [alcohol use](#) or delinquent behaviors, such as skipping school or lying to parents. The researchers also examined factors that might impact friendships, such as participation in school clubs, [socioeconomic status](#), and distance from school to home.

The analysis revealed two main findings: Non-school friendships are more strongly associated with deviant behaviors and alcohol use to a significantly greater degree than in-school friendships. In addition, participants with non-school friends still tended to be engaged with their schools, such as by participating in clubs, and they tended to play central roles in their peer groups.

The study also identified factors associated with a greater proportion of non-school friends, such as attendance at a private Catholic school (perhaps a proxy for attending a school further from home, and/or economic status) or having more educated parents (potentially a proxy for wealth or economic status). Further, it identified factors linked to greater delinquency or alcohol use, such as lack of parental support or enrollment at a school with a high dropout rate.

These findings add to mounting evidence that non-school friendships may be more likely to promote delinquency and alcohol use than in-school friendships. The various associations identified in the study could help inform efforts to reduce delinquency and [underage drinking](#).

The authors add: "Most existing research focused on in-school friendships, but we found that out of school friendships are important as well; adolescents with more out of school friendships reported more adolescent deviance and [alcohol](#) use. Also, a somewhat surprising finding was that youth who have more out of school friendships are

more central in the school network and more likely to participate in [school](#)-based clubs."

More information: Jose R, Hipp JR, Butts CT, Wang C, Lakon CM (2021) A multi-contextual examination of non-school friendships and their impact on adolescent deviance and alcohol use. *PLoS ONE* 16(2): e0245837.
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