

## Parents or Friends? Who Has a More Significant Influence on Adolescent Behaviour?



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**BACKGROUND:** Parents' behaviour is often defined as one of the strongest predictors of adolescent behaviour. However, the influence of peers is also very strong in this period of life. **OBJECTIVE:** To identify factors (both in parents and friends) which influence specific types of adolescent risk behaviour. **METHODS:** The data were collected using questionnaires in which 15-year-old adolescents were asked to provide information about themselves. The method of extreme (or contrast) groups was used to carry out a statistical comparison using chi-square tests. **SAMPLE:** The study sample comprised the participants in ELSPAC (European Longitudinal Study of Parenthood and Childhood). The sample was divided into five groups according to the risk behaviour syndrome. **RESULTS:** The syndrome group considered the opinions of authority figures (such as their father, grandparents, and teachers) as being of the least importance (all the findings were significant at  $p < 0.001$ ). Followed by the group of adolescents with addictive behaviour, the individuals from the syn-

drome group also had the highest number of "problem" friends (users of addictive substances). While the lowest number of heavy smokers among parents was found in the non-risk group of adolescents ( $p < 0.001$ ), their numbers were not the highest in the group with addictive behaviour. No evidence of association with parental drinking was found at all. **CONCLUSIONS:** Adolescents showing risk behaviour may not be more prone to assuming their peers' opinions. However, the structure of the groups of their friends (resulting from the process of social selection) is more fundamental: at-risk adolescents are much more likely to choose risk individuals as their friends. Popularity with others and material circumstances are some of the factors that play an important role in this choice. The models of behaviour in the family seem to be rather a secondary moderating factor for adolescents' risk behaviour. Significantly, individuals at risk show less consideration for the opinions of adults (with mothers being the only exception).

**KEY WORDS:** RISK BEHAVIOUR – EARLY ADOLESCENCE – BEHAVIOUR MODELS – PARENTS – CONTEMPORARIES – CHOICE OF FRIENDS

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