Author's response to reviews

Title: Association between binge drinking, type of friends, and gender: A cross-sectional study among Brazilian adolescents

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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RE: Association between binge drinking, type of friends, and gender: A cross-sectional study among Brazilian adolescents.

Dear Editor,

    We thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript. The following are point-by-point responses to your comments as well as the reviewers’ comments. We hope that you will find the revised version of the manuscript satisfactory for publication. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Patricia Zarzar, on behalf of all authors
Response to Reviewer’s comments:

Reviewer # 1: Toben Nelson
Thank you for addressing my review. I have no additional revisions to suggest.

Our Response:
Thank you very much for your previous comments. They were very helpful for improving our paper.

Reviewer # 2: Louisa Degenhardt

In reading the manuscript, I think that the paper still suffers from lack of coherence in the aims and discussion. Much literature is mentioned for the first time in the discussion section whereas I would have thought it had shaped the aims of the paper and been mentioned in the introduction. I did not get a clear sense of how the authors thought the paper added to the literature. The paper has potential to be an addition to the literature; however I do think it needs further work before it is ready to be accepted for publication.

Our response:
Thank you for your comment. As suggested we have now added paragraphs to the introduction as well as to the discussion clarifying what our paper adds to the literature. We also deleted 2 paragraphs from the discussion section to stick closer to the objectives of our paper.

Below are the paragraphs we added to the Introduction and Discussion sections, as well as the paragraphs that were removed from the Discussion:
Introduction

Despite the preponderance of research examining the influence of peer relationships on binge drinking, few studies have evaluated the link between drinking behavior and the specific types of social relationships represented by peers. In other words, not all friendship ties are equally influential in shaping adolescent behaviors, and the aim of our study was to distinguish between the different types of friendships in various contexts [10,11,13,15,19-21].

Some of these studies [10,11,13] examined the influence of the peer group on alcohol consumption in adolescents, but they were limited to investigating just the school based peer network. However, since the influence of peer networks is not necessarily limited to the school setting, it is important that the multiple friendship networks be investigated, including those based on relationship in groups such as the church or participation in sports [19]. Understanding the relative influence of different types of peer networks on adolescent behavior can be a valuable starting point in developing interventions to modify adolescent behavior such alcohol consumption. Indeed it is more effective sometimes to intervene at the level of peer group rather than the individual, since the group can reinforce any health promotion message and provide social support for maintaining the new behavior [19].

In this paper, we examined the prevalence of binge drinking/alcohol consumption and its association with different types of friendship networks in different contexts (school,
home, church, hobby groups) among male and female students in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Discussion

Paragraphs removed:

Despite being illegal for people under 18 years of age in Brazil, alcohol consumption reached a prevalence of 50.3% among the (mainly under-age) adolescents in our sample. In Brazil, it is recognized that adolescents can easily buy alcohol even though the law prohibits its sale to individuals less than 18 years of age (Romano et al., 2007). Romano et al. (2007) [6] conducted a survey among adolescents between the ages of 13 to 17 years who attempted to purchase alcoholic beverages at a random sample of shops in two cities in southeastern Brazil between 2003 and 2005. They reported that 85% of the adolescents were successful in purchasing alcohol beverages on their first attempt. This rate is much higher than that found in studies in the US (39%) and UK (28.3%) [55, 56].

One of the strengths of the present study was that we investigated adolescents in different schools and in several grade levels. Moreover, the approach we used to measure peer groups and networks was not restricted to the nominated peer group, as previously performed in some other studies [13,68], thereby artificially restricting the size of the peer groups.

Paragraphs added or changed in the Discussion:
Studies developed by Valente et al. (2007) [10]; Jamison and Myers (2008) [11]; Kiuru et al. (2010) [13], previously examined the influence of the peer group on alcohol consumption in adolescents, but they were limited to investigating just the school-based peer network. Other studies investigated the influence of the peer group on alcohol consumption in adolescents based on their religiosity or church attendance [5,63]. We are not aware of a previous study that compared the different type of groups of friends from different contexts in relation to alcohol consumption by adolescents. It is important to consider friendship networks in multiple contexts when examining peer influences on adolescent behavior. Our study was not restricted to nominated peer groups, so it was possible to compare groups of friends from different contexts such as church, school, family and hobby groups. Comparing the different sources of peer connections, we found that adolescent binge drinking was strongly associated with school-based friendship networks relative to church-based networks.

Throughout the course of a lifetime, friendships can direct development through support, modeling, and assistance, but their significance is heightened during adolescence [14]. Peers have the potential to both positively and negatively influence behavior, depending on the behavior endorsed by the peer group [15].

Public health interventions targeted to the peer network might be more cost-effective than previous estimates have suggested because the health-promoting behavior of one person may spread to others via social networks [10,12]. The extent to which the school is a functional community with supportive social relationships, social participations in school activities, and shared norms, goals, and values may also moderate the individual risk of initiating adverse health behaviors such as high alcohol consumption
Our results showed that students having their most important group of friends coming from church seems to be a protective factor with respect to binge drinking. The protective effect of social capital might reflect the effect of norms and social controls on curtailing deviant and dangerous alcohol consumption in communities in which individuals are more bonded to each other [66]. Thus, our findings underscore the importance of deeply exploring how the context can determine alcohol consumption.